

INSANE CLOWN POSSE AND THE LIMINAL WORLD OF CARNIVAL, CLASS,  
AND JUGGALO FAMILY

BY

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Insane Clown Posse and the liminal world of carnival, class, and Juggalo family

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis is an analysis of the boundaries of Juggalos, the subcultural following of the rap group Insane Clown Posse. Analyzing lyrics, documentaries, Juggalo media and qualitative data collected at the 18th annual music festival The Gathering of the Juggalos, I explore the ways in which the subculture utilizes subcultural capital and “badges of dignity” to negotiate with boundaries of class identity. I focus on three major themes: the function of the carnivalesque and horror in creating a subcultural identity, the liberatory bonds of community and chosen-kin networks in Juggalo “family,” and the ways in which these two themes work to formulate Juggalo identity in relation to class. This project works to shift the dialogue regarding white lower class culture and to redefine mainstream analysis of this much-maligned group. Ultimately, Juggalo subculture is a community through which lower class individuals can attempt to subvert status hierarchy while participating in a world-making process of their own.

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Dr. Queen Meccasia Zabriskie

Sociology

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## ***Chapter one: Introduction***

### ***Juggalos: Who/What/Why***

*“What is a juggalo?*

*I don't know*

*But I'm down with the clown*

*And I'm down for life, yo.” - “What Is A Juggalo” by Insane Clown Posse (1997)*

*“For 360 days, being a Juggalo makes them an outcast and makes them reviled and makes them a pariah. But four or five days of the year, being a Juggalo makes them the king of the world and everybody loves them and Insane Clown Posse is the most popular group in the world. It's this alternate universe they can escape into from the dreariness and the mundanity of everyday life.” (Rabin, 2013).*

Insane Clown Posse have referred to themselves as the most hated band in the world. They're probably right to think so. Journalists and critics have primarily referred to the group as “a magnet for ignorance” (*The Guardian*, 2010) or as pure spectacle (*Vice*, 2007), and the FBI classifies their fans as a gang. To view members of the subculture, known as Juggalos, as purely ignorant or purely spectacle is to ignore their nuances.

This project is an exploration of this much maligned subculture and its radical potentials. Through a combination of media analysis and qualitative research at Insane Clown Posse's annual music festival the Gathering of the Juggalos in Oklahoma City, OK in July 2017, I use a grounded theory approach to analyze the significance of the

subculture to those involved. I argue that Juggalos have successfully formed a powerfully subversive network that challenges dominant society through a narrative of the carnivalesque and chosen family. These features of Juggalo culture are present not only through Juggalo media and lyrics, but most significantly at Insane Clown Posse's annual music festival, the Gathering of the Juggalos. As demonstrated in both the lyrics of ICP and in interviews with Juggalos, the culture emphasizes a dialogue of chosen family as restorative social capital. This chosen family negotiates with, subverts, and embraces the boundaries of white trash identity (Wray, 2006; Isenburg, 2015) through its bonds, practices, and a rich aesthetic of carnivalesque horror.

### *Who are Insane Clown Posse?*

I was eight when I first heard the words "Insane Clown Posse" strung together in that order. My fifteen year old sister had just left a rehabilitative group home for teenagers with drug addictions, and one of her peers in the home identified as a Juggalo. According to my sister, this Juggalo played rap music by Insane Clown Posse, who made rhymes about loving mass murders and dead bodies. I was terrified. I was fascinated.

The terror left me as I grew older, but the fascination stuck. It turns out, my sister was wrong. It wasn't Insane Clown Posse singing about loving mass murders and dead bodies, but their affiliates, Dark Lotus in the song "Juggalo Family." But it was Insane Clown Posse who was responsible for this. It was Insane Clown Posse that in 1995 coined the term Juggalo, and applied it to their loyal fans who were more like family than anything. Juggalos aren't actually psychopathic murderous clowns, but outcasts with a penchant for horror-themed theatrics and a lower-class positionality.

Insane Clown Posse is comprised of two men known as Violent J (Joseph Bruce) and Shaggy 2 Dope (Joseph Utsler). Violent J and Shaggy 2 Dope were both from predominantly white, predominantly lower-class neighborhoods in Detroit, Michigan. The two met in the 1980s and bonded over an interest in backyard wrestling, hip-hop, and an upbringing in poverty. By 1989, the two had begun making music together. By 1991, after undergoing jail time, pursuing professional wrestling, and performing with various identities at local night clubs, the two had eventually decided upon the name Insane Clown Posse. The two men utilized the acronym ICP as a reference to their former street gang, Inner City Posse and utilizing the horror-themed influences of Detroit's acid-rap scene. ICP became an outlet through which to express the hardships of poverty, utilizing aggressive, theatrical violence in lyrics as a parallel to the violence of class disparities. The duo became known for these lyrics as well as their use of clown face paint, and quickly developed a devoted following.

On their first full-length album, *Carnival of Carnage*, they introduced a narrative about a travelling carnival of spirits who emerged from the inner city and attack the upper-class members of the suburbs for bolstering inequality. This carnival narrative developed further into a complex mythology of characters and stories. This has become deeply embedded within the subculture, and defines many of its characteristics. It has also made Juggalos a spectacle to outsiders. Spectacle and poverty are deeply intertwined. Lower class styles and imagery are commodified and taken up by mainstream media and fashions, allowing members of dominant society a tourist-like opportunity for consumption (Halnon, 2002). Sociologist Karen Bettez Halnon has interpreted this phenomena in relation to music consumption, particularly within the



genres of metal and hip hop. Bridging both of these genres, Halnon has specifically studied Insane Clown Posse, and the ways in which Juggalo identity is both consumed by the outside world and not. While Juggalo culture has thrived without the support - or appropriation - of mainstream media, record labels, or production companies, they have not avoided the public eye. In this paper, I argue that Juggalo culture's reasons for success are correlated to the reasons why the culture is so looked down upon. Juggalos are united by the alienating experience of being poor, and the Juggalo identity is a negotiation with this identity through the carnivalesque, family, and challenges to the boundary of white trash.

### ***Juggalo media representation***

The mainstream world talks about Juggalos. Juggalos (knowingly) offer a spectacle. A search for the term "Juggalo" in Google News yields 17,600 results, many of which come from major media sources including Washington Post, Vice, and NPR. In recent months, the talk has been related to the March on Washington organized by Insane Clown Posse, challenging the FBI's labelling of Juggalos as a gang. Other articles include ICP concert reviews from outsiders, think-pieces from outsiders, and other news features from outsiders. The point in identifying this is that there is no major representation of Juggalos by Juggalos within mainstream media production beyond that which Insane Clown Posse have themselves created by their own means, leaving the public's perception of Juggalo boundary work largely determined by distant spectacle. There are, however, two mass-market books about Juggalo culture. *You Don't Know Me But You Don't Like Me: Phish, Insane Clown Posse, and My Misadventures with Two of*

*Music's Most Maligned Tribes* (2013) by Nathan Rabin and *Juggalo: Insane Clown Posse, Their Fans, and the World They Made* (2016) by Steve Miller each offer accounts of the writer's experiences embedded within the subculture as outsiders and cultural journalists. Both are sympathetic toward Juggalos, and identify the strength of the subculture amidst a lower-class positionality. Rabin has identified the function of the Gathering of the Juggalos in the quote at the beginning of this introduction as a place where Juggalos, who are outcasts in their day to day life, can feel acceptance. (Rabin, 2013).

Bettez-Halnon has studied the function of the festival space and the carnivalesque in relation to subcultures, including Juggalos. She argues that the contemporary rock, metal, or hip hop music festival is often a liminal space, in some ways relating to Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque. Understanding the carnival space as a place for temporary inversion and liberation from established order, festivals such as the Gathering of the Juggalos foster a sense of collectivity. This is facilitated by something that Halnon refers to as "grotesque realism," which utilizes the abject and obscene as an exaggeration of the everyday and a challenge to structure. In both the festival space and in Juggalo media, the themes of the carnival and the grotesque are essential. I therefore argue that Juggalo culture is explicitly an attempt at forming liminal space and community separate from oppressive class structures and hegemonic ideals. This relates to the anthropological theories of Victor Turner, who identified ritual processes (typically those involved in rite of passage ceremonies) as evocative of liminality, the condition of eluding the network of classification typically

held in cultural spaces (Turner, 1977; 95). It is expressed through symbols that denote transition, denoting “betwixt and between” positionalities of custom and convention. These rituals further promote an unstructured period of community (Turner, 1977; 96).

Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of habitus and theories about the relationship between class and artistic taste help further inform an understanding of Juggalo subculture because they offer a means of connecting one’s music consumption with their position in society. Bourdieu identified habitus as embodied dispositions and relations to social structuring processes, often shared by people of similar class positions (Bourdieu, 1997). In *Distinction*, Bourdieu further argued that one’s habitus relates to their artistic tastes and the forms of media consumed, defining popular, “low” art and refined, “high” art according to wealth disparities. While I interpret Bourdieu’s understanding of class and consumption to be overly deterministic, there indeed seems to be a correlation between being a Juggalo and being lower class. In fact, this is an essential theme throughout Insane Clown Posse’s music. Rather than viewing Juggalo identity as merely the result of a lower class positionality, I instead see Juggalo culture as an empowered, agency-building alternative to mainstream media. This relates to Max Weber’s theories of class and lifestyle in *Class, Status, Party* (2009), and conceptions of boundary work and the social divisions that formulate group identities (Lamont, 2001; 2002). Juggalo culture embodies and embraces a class-situated lifestyle, offering social and subcultural fulfillment. It demonstrates the role class plays in articulating group difference and status, while offering perspective into the possibilities for concepts of status, honor, and power within alternative lifestyles. I refer to class distinctions in a number of ways in this

thesis. “Lower-class” is a broad term – poor, working class, and other terms qualify here as well. There is no singular term that all Juggalos identify with in regards to class identity – Juggalo identity is more associated with habitus associated with class, rather than structural class positions.

In this thesis, I will analyze the role of lower class identity/“white trash” boundaries and carnivalesque horror in developing an alternative, chosen family network in Juggalo subculture as demonstrated in Juggalo media and at the Gathering of the Juggalos. In the first chapter, I will discuss the literature that is central to my analysis of Juggalos and the discourses regarding subcultures, framed particularly around boundaries and subcultural capital. In the following chapter, I will overview my methods of gathering and analyzing my data, as well as my inspirations and reasonings for not only these methods, but the project as a whole. Following this is my first data chapter, which analyzes the role of the carnivalesque as subcultural capital and boundary work for Juggalos. The second data chapter is centered on the topic of family, and discusses the function of chosen, intentional kin bonds and the ways in which discourses surrounding Juggalo family are emancipatory for some and exclusionary for others, defining the limits of the boundary of Juggalo family. The third data chapter is an encompassing analysis of the role of class boundaries and white trash identity in formulating Juggalo subculture. While Juggalo culture is informed by class, it is not firmly determined by it. This analysis will ultimately challenge the dominant way of discussing Insane Clown Posse and Juggalo culture in the context of class and subculture.

## ***Chapter two: Literature Review***

### ***Cultural capital and class***

I begin this study with a basic premise: that class and economic factors have a complex and undeniable role in shaping social order. Amongst the debates regarding the role of economic interest in determining social action, Bourdieu provides the foundational work for understanding the value of sign and symbol, particularly as they relate to alternative forms of capital and cultural production. Bourdieu develops a theory of symbolic power based on the structures and habitus that people embody. Through these embodied arrangements of culture, identity, and economic position, some are more empowered to create capital, symbolic and otherwise. Cultural capital is predominately symbolic in that it is invisible, only recognized as “legitimate competence, as authority exerting an effect of (mis)recognition” (Bourdieu, 1986; 18). Cultural capital is embodied through acquired knowledges and practices that disguise economic capital, and objectified through material objects that display economic capital. It is furthermore institutionalized through strategies like elite schooling, which transform economic capital into cultural. Social capital is the aggregate of resources linked to ones network of relationships, the value of which is determined by the volume of capital held by the individuals within said network (1986; 21). Power is thus defined by ones ability to employ these various forms of capital, linked to a language of the sign which privileges certain forms of linguistic/symbolic power over others (Bourdieu, 1991; 116).

Bourdieu’s understanding of habitus is also essential to this study. In *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977), Bourdieu identifies habitus as the embodied practices of

cultural capital that structure one's daily life and social interactions. One's habitus is also linked to one's aesthetic taste and cultural consumption, according to Bourdieu in *Distinction* (1984). However, some theorists see this as overly deterministic and negating the agency of the individual. Specifically, Michele Lamont (2001) and Julie Bettie (2002) utilize the concept of "badges of dignity" as displays of taste that, while often influenced by class, still embody individual agency. The concept of badges of dignity originates from Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb's 1973 text, *The Hidden Injuries of Class*, which explored the ways in which lower class boys utilized rule-breaking practices such as smoking in order to create a sense of pride amongst each other that authority could not destroy (84). Juggalos display badges of dignity through aesthetics, chosen kin relationships, and other aspects of the Gathering. While Juggalos artistic leanings and creations are deeply informed by their class position, Juggalo culture is evidence of the fact that one is not rigidly bound toward a collective artistic taste dependent on this class position. Rather than being determined by class, Juggalo culture is a subversive expression of and resistance to class positionality.

### ***Subcultures: from deviancy to difference***

In *Subculture*, Ryan Haenfler offers a working definition of subculture: "A relatively diffuse social network having a shared identity, distinctive meanings around certain ideas, practices, and objects, and a sense of marginalization from or resistance to a perceived "conventional" society." Subculture is a means of stigma management emerging from social circumstance (2014). Early theories of subculture rely on conceptions of deviance. Durkheim's definition of deviance as that which defies social norms but functions as an affirmation of said norms and a construction of social

boundaries (Durkheim, 1893) remains as a common thread in these theorizations.

Deviancy is considered the result of social strain, emerging from inadequate access to resources such as familial support, well-paying jobs, and social status (Haenfler, 2014).

But most significantly, deviancy is a means of labelling and defining symbolic boundaries, a negotiated identifier for non-normative identities (Haenfler, 2014).

Subcultures emerge from these identities as meaning-making practices and a reworking of social circumstances. Rather than simply studying deviance deviant, subculture studies since the 1970s have analyzed the use of style (Hebdige, 1979; Haenfler 2014) as a means of actively *presenting* as different from the mainstream. Style also works to works to define the boundaries of subculture *within* itself.

Hebdige (1979) and Stuart Hall & Tony Jefferson (1975) saw subcultures, niche groups of typically young folks united by a shared aesthetic in music and fashion, as methods of resistance. Theorists of this period focused primarily upon style and the function of symbol within stylistic choices. Dick Hebdige's writing on reggae and early punk offered this conclusion: subcultures used stylistic symbols as a means of subverting mainstream tastes and ideology, but mainstream tastes and ideology would quickly reappropriate these symbols again (1979). Theories of postmodernism further determine the discourses surrounding the function of symbol and economics, with Frederic Jameson stating that in with the deterioration of metanarratives and meta-values has led money to be the only symbol that determines value (Jameson, 1991). I do not rely entirely upon this concept, though I find it important to consider as it relates to perceptions of subcultures as determined by consumerism or shaped entirely by class position. This discourse of

economic value vs. metanarratives ultimately informs public and critical interpretation of Juggalos

### ***Subcultures and subcultural capital***

This leads me to a broader means of studying subculture via subcultural capital. In *Club Cultures: Music, Media, and Subcultural Capital*, Sarah Thornton (1995) identified subcultural capital as objects, practices, and beliefs that members of subcultures use to distinguish themselves from others. Objects, practices, and stylings that hold a sense of subcultural capital can provide one with a sense of authenticity within a subculture (Thornton, 1995; 11). The primary difference between subcultural capital and cultural capital is that media institutions have authority over the circulation of the latter (13). Subcultural capital is both embodied and objectified, functioning as a means of boundary making and performing authenticity. Authenticity is an amorphous term broadly understood as the quality of being the type of person we want others to perceive ourselves as. It is a social construct, and its value and meaning is subjective and ongoing (Haenfler, 2014: 83-85). Subcultural capital is similarly specific to context. Different subcultures have different symbols and practices which function as Bourdieuan capital (Haenfler, 2014). Subcultural capital refers to specialized knowledge, sacred objects, and presentations of the body. Subcultural capital and authenticity are continuous negotiations of meaning, both asserting and challenging the boundaries of not only subculture but race, class, and gender.

For Thornton, subcultural capital specific to nightclub music scenes accounts for what makes one “hip” (1995; 11), including specific clothing styles, access to certain



clubs, and the consumption of drugs and alcohol. Thornton posits that club subcultures blur the boundaries of class in that for many of its participants, it is a rebellion against their parent class - i.e., they present themselves as of a lower economic class than they were raised. While age remains a primary defining demographic of club cultures, “the assertion of class distinction relies, in part, on a fantasy of classlessness” (Thornton, 1995; 12). Other accounts of the function of subcultural capital include Ryan Moore’s *Alternative to what? Subcultural capital and the commercialization of a music scene* (2006) in which Moore analyzes how the popularity of grunge and alternative rock music in Seattle, WA impacted the music scenes of San Diego, CA, where record labels sought to recreate their success. The labelling of certain acts as “selling out” or the support of commercial music that had previously been situated within a local music scene became identifiers of inauthenticity and a lack of subcultural capital (Moore, 2006). Other explorations of subcultural capital include multiple studies on cult cinema and its accessibility (Hills, 2015; Jancovich, 2002), anime dubbing and language (Douglas, 2014), and punk and hardcore local music scenes (Daschuk, 2011; Moore, 2010; Driver, 2011). Broadly, what each of these studies of subcultural capital are concerned with is the contestation of authenticity, and the obfuscation of boundaries of class, race, gender, and age as a challenge to hegemonic culture. My research on Juggalo culture relates to these considerations of authenticity and the role of demographic boundaries; however, Juggalo culture does not necessarily attempt to obscure these boundaries. Subcultural capital is indeed used as means of status-building among Juggalos, but its relationship with class in particular remains complex and visible.

Sociologist Karen Bettez-Halnon's work deals with the ways in which symbols of subculture and particularly lower class identity are consumed by the middle and upper class, she identifies the ways in which particular music subcultures are successful in avoiding this process and the empowering potentials of symbolic capital. For Bettez-Halnon, subculture presents the opportunity for liminal escape from the everyday and the formation of alternative networks. Rather than a constructed hierarchy, Juggalo culture - particularly at the carnivalesque festival site, which historically has functioned as a leveling ground (Bettez-Halnon, 2014) - utilizes a web of alternative capital. This web provides the forms of capital, both material and symbolic, that have evaded Juggalos in the everyday. Given that Juggalos are predominantly lower class white people, often from rural communities, the opportunities for economic growth are often limited. The formation of an alternative network of capital through the Juggalo subculture becomes an essential way of world-making.

### ***Boundary work***

Juggalo culture utilizes subcultural capital as a means of boundary work. Boundary theory is the analysis of classifying processes and its effects (Wray, 2006; 140). Boundary work is the practice of defining and redefining said boundaries (Lamont, 2001; 2002). Lamont's *The Dignity of Working Men* discusses the ways in which morals shape and define working class identity along racial lines, offering a means of exploring the development of social boundaries as they are formed both by those within a boundary and those outside. Matt Wray's *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness* (2006) and Nancy Isenberg's *White Trash: The 400-Year Untold History of*

*Class in America* (2016) identify the construction of the boundaries of “white trash” identity, something which Juggalo culture grapples with. Both texts offer an analysis of the historical development of a bounded white lower class identity through means of rhetoric, policy, scientific labelling, and popular literature since colonial America. Wray and Isenberg emphasize how class has played an essential role in shaping cultural boundaries in the United States, despite a common ideology of social mobility and freedom. These boundaries have been formed by labelling those with low-skill jobs, those who may be uneducated, and those who are unemployed as ignorant, lazy, unclean, and generally a bane to society (Wray, 2006; Isenberg, 2016). This is essential in studying Juggalos because it is often associated with white lower class identity. The construction of “white trash” is significant in understanding the broader cultural perception of Juggalos, as well as the ways in which the subculture is in negotiation with “white trash.”

### ***Chapter three: Methods + data***

My interest in this project was developed from a lifelong curiosity about the Juggalo subculture and a more academic fascination with the function of sign and symbol in postmodern consumer culture. In preliminary research early in my undergraduate career, I found the topic of the carnivalesque to bridge the gap between these two topics in that it dominated Juggalo aesthetics but furthermore had extensive symbolic meaning beyond the subculture. I was also concerned with exploring the relationship between class and cultural distinctions in a non-prescriptive way, one that honored the agency of the individual and the pride of identity. I wanted to explore the field of “low” culture as someone with origins from within it. This is also the reasoning behind my specialized Area of Concentration in Media & Cultural Studies. Rather than utilizing a strictly sociological approach, this Area of Concentration allows for an interdisciplinary study of subculture that approaches the topic with literary analysis, music, and philosophy as well.

I decided that the best way to study contemporary Juggalo culture while having access to self-identified Juggalos in one location would be to attend their annual music festival, The Gathering of the Juggalos. I’d read articles from numerous news publications over the last several years that covered the festival, so I had a general idea of its scope and nature. I also knew, however, that publications may sensationalize the Gathering and that it would be essential to enter the field with an open mind and lack of preconceived notions. My work would be to have Juggalos speak for themselves, rather than having an academic speak for them.

My field work occurred at the 18th annual Gathering of the Juggalos, which took place between July 26th, 2017 through July 29th, 2017 at Lost Lakes Amphitheater in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.. I conducted participant observation from my arrival Wednesday night until Saturday evening, and conducted interviews beginning Thursday afternoon of the festival. My data set for interview participants included anyone above the age of 18 attending the Gathering of the Juggalos. I designed the interviews to be open ended, allowing the interviewee to direct much of the dialogue. However, my guiding question was: What does it mean to be a Juggalo? From here, I asked interviewees what the significance of “family” was to them, when and why they began identifying as Juggalos, and their opinions regarding the festival as well as the FBI gang-label. I conducted 13 interviews, speaking to a total of 20 people. Some of the interviews were with individual Juggalos, while others were with small groups. All of these interviews are from people who identify as Juggalos. The interviews range from two minutes to thirty minutes in length. Some Juggalos felt comfortable sharing an array of life experiences, while others only offered brief comments.

In conducting my field research, my primary goal was to attend the festival as a fan would. However, there were some issues with this. Given my necessity for internet access and electricity in conducting my research, I did not camp at the festival and instead stayed at a motel a few miles from the grounds. However, I attended the festival for approximately 10-12 hours each day. At the festival, I spent the majority of my time in the central festival area near the main stage, lake, and vendors rather than further into the festival grounds where many people camped. I took handwritten notes, as well as notes on my cellphone, as often as possible at the festival. I also took notes in

surrounding areas, such as at the motel or local Waffle House, both of which were filled with people wearing Juggalo-related clothing or displaying Juggalo-related stickers on their cars. I observed for anything and everything seeming notable or definitive to the culture, but made particular care to observe for things related to the carnivalesque.

I attended the festival with a press pass. I obtained this press pass by locating the email address of an employee of Psychopathic Records, Insane Clown Posse's label, on the Gathering website. I emailed this individual explaining that I was a student conducting research on Juggalos, and had journalistic experience reporting on festivals. I had previously published coverage on a variety of other music festivals for a notable online publication. I offered to cover the festival for this publication, and was granted a press pass to do so. Being positioned as a journalist may have both benefited and harmed my research on certain occasions. A few days prior to the Gathering, a local Oklahoma City newspaper ran an article about the festival, disparaging Juggalos as a gang. The article was shared over Juggalo/Gathering-specific Facebook pages by those who encountered it. It not only frustrated Juggalos to see that there was already negative press in Oklahoma, but also concerned some that police would be targeting the festival. Many of those attending the festival may have entered the event with the belief that authorities did not welcome them. There was also an increased police presence compared to previous Gatherings, according to many Juggalos I spoke to. With all of this in mind, some may have been suspicious of my intentions as a journalist. Given the way Juggalos have been portrayed and the attitudes they have previously faced, some may have feared that I would further cast Juggalos in a negative light, or identify them in a way that could harm them. However, as I explained my position as a researcher and specifically a music

journalist, most people I approached seem to become more comfortable. I furthermore assured everyone of their anonymity if they wanted it. Everyone who agreed to be interviewed was comfortable offering their first name or a nickname. Those for whom I have a last name on record gave me permission to do so; otherwise, my transcriptions only contain first names or nicknames. A small portion of people I approached declined to be interviewed, but most agreed. I believe my position as a young woman, dressed in a non-professional way, may have helped make people see me as someone “safe” to speak with.

Potentially for these same reasons, I struggled to find women willing to speak with me. Men make up the gender majority of the subculture, but there remained a significant presence of women. However, women I approached often declined to speak with me. Other times, if I approached small groups of Juggalos at the festival, men would agree to speak with me while the women would not. My interviews are therefore skewed toward a male perspective. The subculture is furthermore predominately white, and most, but not all, of my interviewees were white.

I most often spoke with people who were out in the public spaces at the festival, rather than approaching camp sites. I am unsure if this was the right decision, but I did not want to make others feel uncomfortable by having an outsider encroach upon their personal space. I saw the more open areas of the festival, such as the lake access point, vendor areas, and locations with multiple public picnic tables as the appropriate place to approach others. If I were to conduct this field research again (which, I hope to do as a journalist) I would camp at the festival and make a stronger effort to form deeper connections with those that I met. Experiencing the festival space via Juggalo’s camp

sites would have enhanced my research, but did not feel appropriate given my positionality and the brevity of my encounters. Given the increased police presence at this particular Gathering, an outsider with a press pass may have not been easily welcomed into private spaces.

In addition to interviews and field notes, I also analyzed music and other Juggalo media. I selected which media to analyze based on what I interpreted to be relevance to the culture. For example, songs with a significant number of YouTube views tell how popular the song is among Juggalos but also among mainstream society. These videos help shape the overall discourse of Juggalo culture within and beyond itself. I furthermore selected songs to use in my analysis based upon searching through online lyric databases for keywords such as family. These keywords emerged as significant from analyzing my interviews. Given the increased dialogue regarding white lower class identity in the media as well as the Juggalo gang label, I additionally searched for songs relating to themes of race, class, and the carceral. I had previously conducted a content analysis of five Insane Clown Posse albums, chosen according to sales, and therefore had a familiarity with a wide array of their music. Nevertheless, the music I discuss in this thesis was selectively chosen according to relevance of the themes that emerged in my field research.

News articles were an additional element I used both to analyze and understand Juggalo culture. Again, this relates heavily to the discourses that surround the subculture. Sources that originate from outside the Juggalo community can not necessarily be seen as defining the subculture, but instead are used to gauge the public dialogue regarding it. This helps to explain the confrontational attitudes and lyrics of the music, the FBI's gang



label, and a distrust toward authority. Public discourse regarding Juggalo culture defines the ways in which the culture is suppressed and marginalized.

The overarching goal of these methods is to best study the ways in which knowledge is produced in the subculture. I based my methodology on that of other music ethnographers, particularly Karen Bettez Halnon. In her multiple years of research studying music subcultures and festivals, Halnon utilized a combination of formal and informal practices. This included interview and participant observation, but at times primarily involved simply existing within subcultural spaces, such as festivals, concerts, meet & greets, and for some subcultures, bars. This is important again in mediating the positionality of the researcher. Halnon additionally blended her field research with analysis of media of all kinds. She discusses her methodology as utilizing a grounded theory approach in her research of music subcultures and class symbolism. In both cases, her practice involves collecting and analyzing symbols, both as they emerge in the field and in media. Halnon then constructs a theoretical approach to the content that has emerged through this practice. I utilized a similar approach, guided by the notion of grounded theory. This was appropriate for two primary reasons. The first is that it allows for the topic to speak for itself. It better allowed be to avoid imposing a theory upon the subculture prior to my field research. The second reason is that it provided a better opening for studying the topic in a way that was not strictly sociological. Halnon's use of both field research and media was similarly appropriate for approaching my topic from a Media and Cultural Studies perspective, as she combines sociological research with journalistic inquiry and critical theory.

My methods were also influenced by Dick Hebdige's work *Subculture* (1979), which similarly incorporated music analysis, interviews, and an examination of symbols. Interviewing practices were furthermore informed by Julie Bettie's *Women Without Class: Girls, Race, and Identity* (2002). Bettie's work aided my understanding of approaching different knowledges, and exploring the intersections of identity through interviewing.

After conducting my field research, I transcribed each interview and my field notes. The carnivalesque/horror, family, and class were the topics that emerged as most prevalent to the culture in my field work, and "triangulation", a method of utilizing several research methods to test findings (Babbie, 2007; 113) between content analysis, interviews, and participant observation supports this. These themes are interconnected, and there is significant overlap among them. What follows in this thesis is an analysis of these three major themes. In the following chapter, I will analyze the first of these three major themes: the carnivalesque. Carnival imagery and carnival practices emerged as significant in both my field work and in Juggalo media, and I will discuss the significance of the carnivalesque as a form of subcultural capital and means of boundary work for Juggalos.

## ***Chapter four: The carnivalesque***

### ***Insane Clown Posse's Dark Carnival as mythology of subversion and symbolism***

This chapter will explore the ways in which ICP utilizes the clown identity as a practice of symbolic inversion, and the significance of the carnivalesque to the subculture. The association between Insane Clown Posse (ICP) and the carnivalesque is tangible even to an outsider - not only is the word “clown” part of their title, but the duo never makes a public appearance without black and white clown face paint. The carnivalesque is the primary theme through which Insane Clown Posse makes spectacle of themselves.

They're quite aware of their facepaint being somewhat of a gimmick (Spin, 2015), but the use of the carnivalesque goes far beyond that. Clowns have a historical association with the carnival as a “fool” figure in the tradition of Mikhail Bakhtin (Morson, Emerson, 1990), which I will elaborate upon in this chapter. I interpret the use of clowning in Juggalo culture as a means of resistance, employed in order to avoid it being being carnivalized by others. By dressing as clowns, Juggalos take agency for how they are perceived. They consciously make fools of themselves before anyone else can, associating themselves with liminal theatrics and a complex tradition of the figure of the fool. Juggalo culture employs the carnivalesque in its overarching musical narratives, as well as in practices at the festival site. The clown identity and participation in carnival narrative within Juggalo culture can be seen as badges of dignity (Sennett, Cobb, 1973; Bettie, 2003). The clown identity and carnivalesque practices are means of creating a world of subcultural capital in which stigmatized identities can provide emotional and social value.

### *Clowns, Carnavalesque, and Clowning*

The clown identity is not universally defined, nor uniformly presented across cultures. However, clowns largely have a shared function (Charles, 1945). Clowns are denoted by “earthiness, poverty, renegade irresponsibility, irreverence, and license of all sorts,” holding an outsider status either temporarily or permanently. Clowns, in an Americanized imagination, can still have a variety of meanings and histories. Though clown-like figures have historically been present in rituals and performances across the world, the clown figure which is most commonly seen in the United States has roots in medieval Europe, with Greco-Roman theater as its predecessor. The term “clown” was first recorded in English in 1563 referring to rustic peasants. “Clown” is potentially Latin in origin, coming from the word *colonus*, translating to farmer. The Oxford English Dictionary offers the first definition for clown to be “A countryman, rustic, or peasant,” (OED 1) followed by two definitions referring to clowns as people who are ignorant and without cultural refinement (OED 2). Definitions explaining the association with jesters and harlequin performance follow (OED 3). References from 1563 to the mid-1800s offer record of the word “clown” as modified by being from the countryside. Though associated with jesters, the clown is different in that it implies a natural behavior. The clown is rural, and in some senses, childlike in its ignorance. For this reason, clowns were considered funny and entertaining. In Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, written in 1603, there is the line, “The clowne shall make them laugh That are tickled in the lungs.” (OED 3a). As there are multiple varying definitions for clowns, fools, jesters, and theatrical comics, these terms quickly blended in meaning and function (Hornback, 2009). The clown was

no longer simply a rustic fool, but a theatrical figure with actions and meanings embedded within structures and sanctioned times of merriment and laughter.

One particular period of merriment and laughter is that of the carnival. Mikhail Bakhtin's analysis of the folk tradition of carnival offers an understanding of the ideological significance of the period. Carnival originally served as a phase of the Liturgical calendar prior to Lent, a period of restriction and repentance for sins. In preparation for this time of constraint, Carnival offered the opportunity for excess, transgression, subversion, and liminality. Certain rules regarding adultery were lifted, and particular emphasis was placed upon physical enjoyment, particularly laughter. Bakhtin writes that

“Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates in it because its very idea embraces all the people. While carnival lasts, there is no life outside of it. During carnival time life subject only to its laws, that is, the laws of its own freedom. It has a universal spirit: it is a special condition of the entire world, of the world's revival and renewal, in which all take part. Such is the essence of the carnival, vividly felt by all its participants,” (Bakhtin, 1936).

The period of carnival is a leveling experience, embracing all while deconstructing the confines of social law. It is, most importantly, a shared feeling among participants. Bakhtin describes the significance of the clown during medieval carnival, maintaining a constant representation of the liminal status of the carnival period. The clown laughs at others, is laughed at, and laughs at oneself (Morson, Emerson, 1990), Rather than actors on a stage, clowns sustained their identity as both “real and ideal at the same time... on the borderline between life and art.” (Bakhtin, 1936) In related feasts and rituals, there was also the practice of appointing fools, clowns, slaves, and peasants as king and other members of hierarchical rule. The carnival period and its similar festivals

were, according to Bakhtin, a challenge to deeply embedded structural norms, even if sanctioned by higher authorities like the Church.

Despite these origins within the Catholic church, themes and practices of the carnivalesque have recurred throughout culture, but particularly so in music. The carnival is an essential concept to Juggalos both in music and in practice. Given the scope and history of potential identities aligned with clowning, music movements prior to Insane Clown Posse have been understood as performances of clowning. Lane Van Ham posits early punk as an example of this (2009). Van Ham defines clowning as an expression of the subjunctive mood of Victor Turner's concept of liminality, wherein sociocultural norms are suspended in acts of symbolic inversion. In the early UK punk scene of Dick Hebdige's focus (1979), working class youths subverted symbols of the everyday and embraced destruction and confrontation, as embodied in music like Sex Pistol's 1976 song "Anarchy in the U.K.". In the US, early punk was primarily (but not exclusively) the product of middle class art school students, but employed liminal practices of gender subversion and an aesthetic of emptiness, as seen in New York Dolls' drag stylings and Richard Hell and the Voidoids 1977 album *Blank Generation*. For Van Ham, these practices of spectacle and liminality position punk musicians as clowns. These practices at times attempted to subvert a class identity. Most importantly, these practices are examples of badges of dignity, converting a cultural ennui, lack of economic prospects, or the confinements of gender into rebellious and fulfilling aesthetics. Music is thus a significant site of the production of badges of dignity.

***The importance of the carnival in Insane Clown Posse's discography: The Dark  
Carnival mythology***

Insane Clown Posse's use of clowning as a liminal act of symbolic inversion is explicit. They make prominent display of their clown identity in their stylings, as well as through an embrace of the aforementioned themes of irreverence, outsider status, and a disruption of norms. Insane Clown Posse, both in their narratives and in their own music festival, have followed this tradition. However, ICP connect the carnivalesque with abject symbolism, repeating the theme of scary clowns that emerged somewhere within the 20th century with serial killer John Wayne Gacy or Stephen King's *It*. An abject Carnival, referred to by ICP and Juggalos as the Dark Carnival, is the primary feature of the majority of Insane Clown Posse's discography, particularly within their "Joker's Card" series of albums that continue a narrative story developed on their first album, *Carnival of Carnage*.

*Carnival of Carnage* serves as a boundary and identity-setting work for the group. As they built their following and the term "Juggalo" was developed, this album grew to serve as a boundary and identity-setting work for the subculture as a whole, establishing performative horror, lower class positionality, and a resistance against oppression as their primary thematic bonds. The album speaks to themes beyond the carnival, such as the experience of Violent J's first day out of jail after six months and Insane Clown Posse's hatred for the Rebel Flag. However, the most significant thematic aspect of the album is the introduction of this carnival and its characters, which formulate the Dark Carnival.

The Dark Carnival is the internal narrative to Insane Clown Posse's discography. It is a concept they introduced first in their debut album *Carnival of Carnage*, and have carried through each album since. The Dark Carnival is a travelling carnival of spirits who fulfill roles like the ringmaster, jesters, and other traditional circus figures. Most of these characters are introduced through specific albums. Insane Clown Posse refers to each album as a "Joker's Card," with the entire series identified as the deck. In many of the songs, the characters within the Dark Carnival exist within a liminal space between life and death, the material world and some type of afterlife. For example, this album opens with a song simply titled "Intro," (1992) setting the scene of a traditional restorative story by introducing the setting of a small town stating that an "evil" carnival has entered as its residents slept.

*"These frightening strangers set up tents and rides  
Shows and games  
There were savage jesters and wicked ringmasters  
There were horrid freak shows  
And sights only the impending doom will witness  
They brung with them  
The carnage that they had lived with for eternity"*

With this song, Insane Clown Posse introduces the concept of a travelling carnival of characters with a supernatural element. *Carnival of Carnage* identifies particular individuals that would become significant to Juggalo subculture, such as the Juggla, a figure that murders people and juggles its body parts. At a live concert, while performing

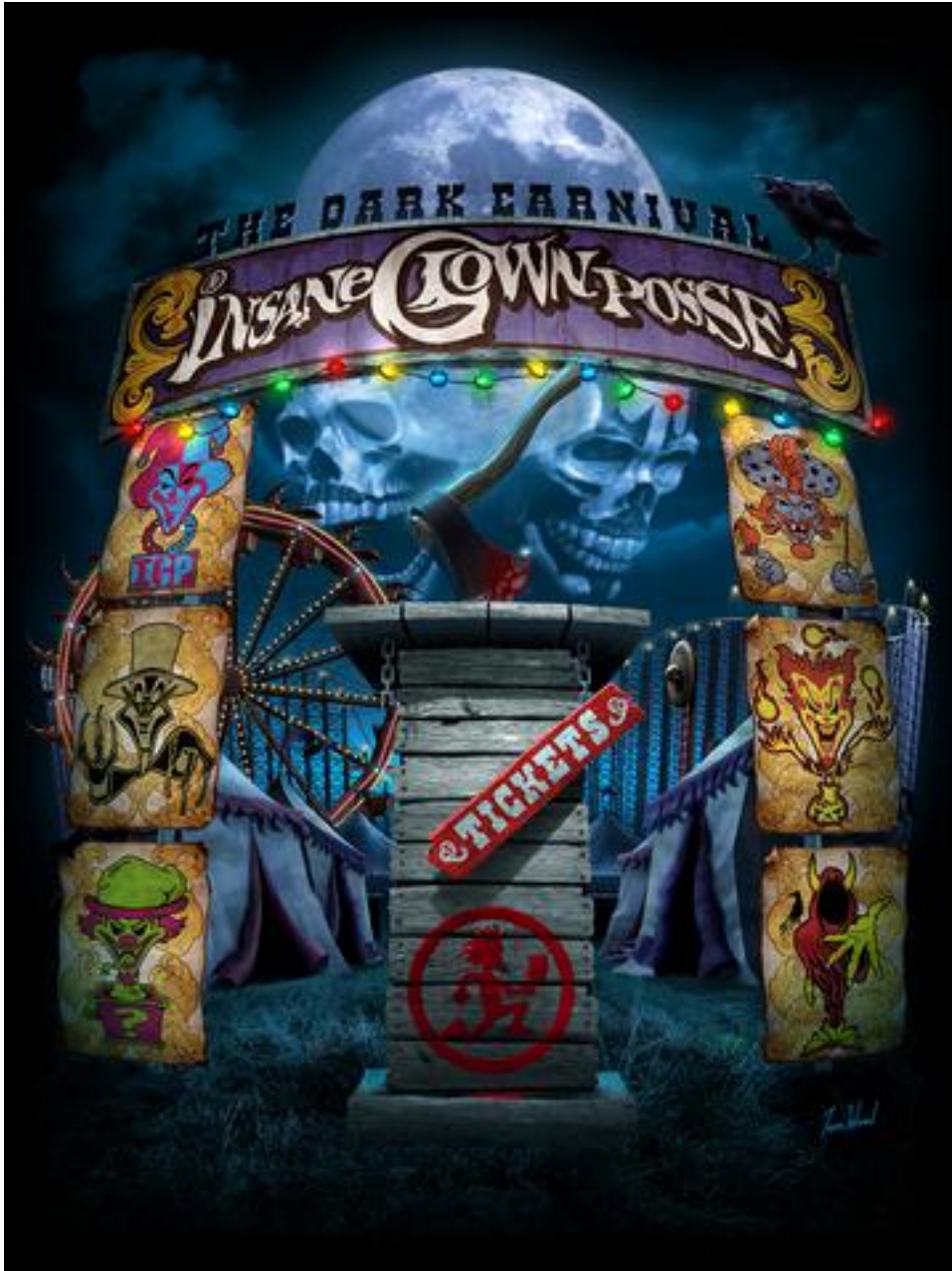


“The Juggla” early in their career, ICP referred to the audience as “Juggalos” for the first time (NPR, 2017).

Another figure is The Ringmaster, a spirit one must defeat when they die. The strength and size of the Ringmaster is correlated with how one lived their life. The more pain one caused to others, the larger and more powerful the Ringmaster becomes. As the narrative goes, this Dark Carnival emerged from an impoverished inner city and doles out punishments against the upper class. Violent J describes it as a

“traveling carnival that takes itself out of these fucked-up neighborhoods and into the wealthy ones, bringing destruction and craziness throughout. It's like a haunted carnival... It's coming to the racist people and fucking them up and punishing the evil! Getting the fucking wealthy ones, the evil, no-good suburbanites that don't fucking give a shit about what's happening in the city, in the ghetto neighborhoods.” (Rolling Stone, 2015).

The Dark Carnival narrative is intended to be a mythology providing insight into how one ought to live their life. Though produced through the music, the mythology has presence in almost all aspects of Juggalo material culture. Its characters appear on a massive assortment of merchandise, from clothes to card games to action figures, and are essential signifiers of Juggalo identity. Nearly all aspects of the culture take on a carnivalesque element. These images formulate a rich mythology of signifiers that define the visual culture of Juggalos.



*Figure 1.*

The artwork above is a piece commissioned by Insane Clown Posse created by artist Tom Wood, who specializes in fantasy works and has created a significant amount of visuals for the group. This image in particular encompasses a broad array of symbols and figures that are important to the subculture. The beams of the entryway pictures are comprised of “jokers cards,” each portraying a different character of the Dark Carnival

series. On the left beam is an unnamed character from the cover of *Carnival of Carnage*, sometimes identified as The Juggla, followed by the Ringmaster (from the 1994 album of the same name) and the Riddlebox (from the 1995 album of the same name). On the right is The Great Milenko (from the 1997 album of the same name), Jack Jeckel (of the 1999 album *The Amazing Jeckel Brothers*), and The Wraith (from the 2002 album of the same name). The individual characters, as well as the Hatchetman symbol, were originally designed by Shaggy 2 Dope, but have been incorporated into a setting of Wood's creation inspired by the Dark Carnival narrative. This visual displays the significant symbols of the Dark Carnival, including its essential figures, in a seemingly haunted Carnival setting evocative of horror and death.

The final song on *Carnival of Carnage*, "Taste" offers an elaboration upon the purpose of this travelling Dark Carnival. The first verse of this song is performed by Jumpsteady, Violent J's older brother. Jumpsteady is not a member of Insane Clown Posse, but is part of the Psychopathic Records family.

*"The time has come  
For the blood to run in the streets paved with gold  
...  
We must move into the suburbs  
And punish the rich for their ignorance  
And the horror of death  
That is a part of our life in our neighborhood  
And give them a taste of the same"*

The narrative presented here parallels that of the first song on the album, "Intro." It clarifies that the "carnage that they had lived with for eternity" is situated in class

oppression. It also presents the dichotomy of lower class neighborhoods vs. suburbs, and suggests that the wealthy people of the suburbs are responsible for the disenfranchisement of lower class neighborhoods. Jumpsteady continues:

*“And when we kill the government's children  
And the streets smell of death  
Maybe then we'll see our situation in a new light  
And put an end the the chaos in the ghetto  
And put an end to the killings”*

The punishment of the rich is not simply for vengeance, but an attempt to restore peace in their home neighborhood. In this song, ICP and Jumpsteady are referring to inner city Detroit. They do not expound the exact ways in which the government and wealthy people of the suburbs are responsible for the poverty and violence of the neighborhood, but clearly cite this as their reason for attack.

This song offers an explanation of the goals of the Dark Carnival that Violent J cited in Rolling Stone (2015) - to to punish the rich for their sins against the lower class. With this, Insane Clown Posse establishes a lower class identity and further, an expression of the violent consequences of this. By using explicit and performative violence in the music, the Dark Carnival narrative functions as an outlet to express ICP's anger surrounding their positionality.

*“Rich bitch fucker took me for a sucker  
Now we killing you instead of killing each other  
Walked in your house  
Shot him in the mouth  
Lean back the head and blow the brains out*

*My lyrics are strong*

*It's only a song*

*The government fronts like they don't know what's going on*

*Fuck it, I'll take the matter in my own hands."*

Here, ICP makes unambiguous statements of horror and murder but reflexively identifies that it is “only a song” and, despite being fictional, in a sense remains a way for ICP to “take matters in [their] own hands.” It is an expression of anger against a world and set of circumstances formed by the upper class - a “rich bitch fucker” who assumed that members of the lower class would remain helpless to change their conditions. There is an association between the wealthy and the government here, conspiring together to keep the city and lower class residents impoverished. This is, historically, the truth about the formations of the city in the 20th century. Neighborhood boundaries have consistently and intentionally been drawn by governing bodies along racial and class lines, with the development of suburbia an intentional way of separating white, middle to upper class people from the lower class and people of color. Detroit is a significant site of this phenomena (Clotfelter, 1976; Hoff, 2008). The narrative of an inner-city carnival travelling to the suburbs to murder the rich is in discourse with this historical narrative. ICP uses this narrative to position themselves as combatants against the consequences of these socioeconomic structures.

### ***Horror and class at the carnivalesque festival***

The festival site, the Gathering of the Juggalos, serves as an embodiment of the themes of the carnivalesque horror of their songs. Given the physical similarities of a festival site to a carnival setting, there is precedence in identifying music festivals as a place of liminality. Sociologist Karen Bettez Halnon cites heavy metal and horrorcore hip hop festivals (such as the Gathering of the Juggalos) as examples of a Bakhtinian carnival

setting (2006). Additionally, Halnon identifies performative horror, lower class positionality, and a resistance against oppression - the primary themes of Insane Clown Posse's music - as practices of *grotesque realism*. Grotesque realism is "not simply what is disgusting or obscene in a limited sense but a potentially limitless challenge to the structural and moral orders of everyday life." (Halnon, 2006). The Dark Carnival mythology in Juggalo culture presents a literal and metaphoric case of grotesque realism. I identify these Juggalo symbols and practices as such because they emphasize the abject body and horror in a way that subverts hegemonic culture. Through practices of grotesque realism, the Gathering of the Juggalos serves as a real-life challenge to the structural oppression Insane Clown Posse identifies in their music. Images of the Dark Carnival and other examples of grotesque realism function as badges of dignity within the subculture. The festival site presents the opportunity for Juggalos to produce and wear these badges of dignity. There, the Dark Carnival narrative takes lived form through various performances, the special layout and aesthetics of the festival, and a multi-faceted emphasis upon the body. It is a place in which the subcultural capital of wearing Juggalo related clothing, painting ones face with clown makeup, and becoming sticky with Faygo soda provides true meaning and pride.

### ***Festival Performances and Schedule***

The grotesque has immediate representations in the lived Juggalo experience, particularly at the festival. The Gathering of the Juggalos functions much like an animate experience of the *Carnival of Carnage* (1992) album narrative through play and performance. In addition to numerous live musical performances, the festival also hosts an extensive schedule of sideshow-style acts and contests, such as a hypnotist show, skin suspension

(a type of body modification performance where one places hooks in the skin of their back and swings from it) and contortionists. In the program for the Gathering, these acts were detailed on a page labelled “Side Shows.” There were wrestling performances, Faygo-chugging contests, and a Miss Juggalette pageant. During this pageant, Juggalettes could wear their choice of clothing and makeup and had the opportunity to be interviewed in front of an audience as well as the option of performing a talent for the crowd. Participants wore a complete variety of looks, with some dressed in extravagant costumes, some wearing lingerie, and others wearing their everyday clothes. Talents ranged from dancing and freestyle rapping to more carnivalesque acts like fire spinning and juggling. Some aspects of the pageant played upon normative concepts of a pageant, but it ultimately allowed for a diverse display of women, beauty, and talents. This is indicative of the grotesque again not in the sense of the obscene or disgusting but in its challenge to the everyday – at the Gathering, there is a sense that people can dress and behave in the way they desire, rather than in the way mainstream culture requires.

### *Space*

The festival serves as a place where Juggalos can truly be oneself, so to speak. It is a place embedded with meaning, familial meaning, as opposed to the generalized non-spaces such as highways, grocery stores, and other everyday places occupied by necessity (Auge, 1995). In these non-spaces, a Juggalo is subject to prejudice, even to the point of being arrested. Though the Gathering is not subject to specific boundaries of physical space in that it has been held at a variety of rented venues over the last eighteen years, it still functions as a place of embedded meaning developed over the span of its existence by Juggalo practices. The land and layout of the festival itself may not hold

particular meaning for Juggalos, though the Gathering as an experience situated in time and space does. The Gathering is a powerful experience for Juggalos in that they do not risk the same consequences of being themselves at the festival. It is a chance to truly be a Juggalo, without fear. For many, this is an existential and nearly religious experience of identity. According to hooks, “enjoying the benefits of living and loving in community empowers us to meet strangers without fear and extend to them the gift of openness and recognition” (hooks, 2000). The Gathering functions as a meaning-embedded space in which practices of a love ethic and community can function, where Juggalo identity can be displayed and honored.

The festival is also carnival-like in organization and aesthetics, promoting the idea that those in attendance are in a liminal space (Halnon, 2004). Most of the stages, merchandise shops, and even the medics were constructed under large tents, and the majority of festival attendees camped out in smaller tents in the surrounding areas. The Gathering also typically features carnival rides, though there were none during the year I attended due to the new location. As mentioned, live performances such as contortionists and skin suspension are labelled as “sideshow” within the Gathering program. The main stage of the festival had different hosts each day, who were referred to as the Big Top hosts. A sense of carnival liminality is, at very least, promoted in the ideology of the event’s program, which on the first page reads:

“Stand in the center of the light and feel your soul become filled with a joy and a peace so powerful it might move your Juggalo soul into a state of pure, unbridled bliss and liberation. For this is no ordinary Gathering of the Juggalos. This is the only year where the heavenly beam of ’17 will be felt by the Juggalo Nation in this annual event of togetherness, love, music, and family bonds that surpass all known notions of space and time, finding us right here, deeply rooted in our own little slice of Forever”



This paragraph emphasizes the idea that the experience of unity at the Gathering has the ability to transcend structures of the everyday.

### ***Bodies***

Halnon analyzes the unifying nature of the grotesque, particularly in the live context. The grotesque includes not simply horror or gore, but any element of the bodily experience which may be closed off from conventional existence as abject, including sweat, body odor, and general dirtiness. Live music performances often involve crowded settings, where bodies touch and dance and sweat together. This offers a leveling, unifying function in which a “utopian realm of community, freedom, equality, and abundance” is produced (Bakhtin, 1984) allows for a life-enhancing experience of transformation and creativity (Halnon, 2004). At the Gathering, the grotesque was embraced as filth, sweat, and grittiness are worn as badges of dignity that signify ones devotion to the subculture. Juggalos spent four days in 100°F weather in dusty Oklahoma City, OK. In this setting, people quickly became dirty not simply from being outdoors and dancing to music, but also through other Juggalo practices. Moreover, the liminality of the Gathering of the Juggalos strengthens the bonds of Juggalo subculture. These practices are carnivalesque in the sense that they are a reversal of the everyday: these Faygo-throwing feuds, dirtiness and expressions of the body are freed from traditional associations, aggression, or judgements. For example, at Juggalo concerts one must be prepared to possibly become drenched in Faygo soda, as throwing open cans and launching litres of the soda is almost ritual. At the Gathering, this is taken a step further. There were multiple additional

occasions in which one could unexpectedly be hit with Faygo outside of the festival's venue spaces. The Gathering offered two trolley trains (covered carts with bench seating pulled by tractors) that transported people around various parts of the festival. The practical function of these trolleys was coupled with performative, playful functions. Many people rode the trolley around the festival grounds for extended periods of time, standing on the bench seating and yelling (lighthearted) obscenities or cat calls (by and toward men and women) at the people they passed. Occasionally, people would throw Faygo at the trolley as it went by. When the trolleys passed each other going opposite directions, momentary riots would break loose between the two, each pummeling each other with Faygo and cursing each other out. The Faygo combined with the Oklahoma dust quickly caked the trolleys in sticky dirt and puddles of soda. All of this, however, was part of the fun of the Gathering. These fake feuds that emerged between the trolleys were mirrored at a variety of other events at the Gathering, for no real reason beyond entertainment. Meanwhile, nudity at the Gathering is considered a common site, as is bikini wearing among people of all genders and sizes. This again exemplifies the positive carnivalesque nature of the festival. The physicality of bodies is bolstered. Traditional body politics are not part of the discourse of the space, forming a sense of equality among bodies.

Daniel Bogus, a 29 year old Juggalo from Michigan that I spoke to at the Gathering explained his first realization of being a part of the subculture through this expression of the grotesque body at his first Insane Clown Posse concert:

*“Everyone’s sharing sweat, bumping shoulders. I’m just like, “Bring on this Faygo I’ve heard about, that’s what I want.” Little did I know, that’s all anyone could ever want. That’s the love. That’s being showered by the carnival. It’s such*

*an amazing experience. I knew on the way to the show, I'm in the backseat and my friends are like 'Is he a Juggalo?' and Shimmy's like 'He's a Juggalo. He don't know it.' But I knew at the end of that night."* (Bogus, July 26th, 2017)

For Daniel Bogus, this live concert experience and its bodily nature - the sharing of sweat between bodies, the rain of Faygo - was an almost spiritual experience of bonding and belonging. Bogus had a familiarity with Faygo as a Juggalo symbol, and saw the act of being sprayed with the soda as a transformational ritual of becoming a Juggalo. The active desire among Juggalos to be sprayed with sticky, cheap soda is a resistance against the everyday and its moral orders of cleanliness. It is an example of the comic and playful inversion of structure that shapes the Bakhtinian carnival (Halnon, 2004). To be drenched in Faygo is again a badge of dignity within the subculture, an embodiment of subcultural capital that signifies one's depth of experience as a Juggalo.

According to Halnon, this emphasis upon the "grotesque body" in the context of carnivalesque music festivals is associated with "outcast communities of belonging" (Halnon, 2006), offering an egalitarian challenge to the commercialized mainstream through practices of dis-alienation (Halnon, 2004). This concept of outcast community or outsidership is essential for Juggalos explaining their identification with the subculture. The Gathering is dis-alienating in that it emphasizes both a re-connection with the grotesque body (being sweaty, dirty, sticky, etc) and a connection with others. At the Gathering, I asked a group of Juggalos from Omaha, NE why they identified as Juggalos. Each of them had attended Gatherings between 8 and 15 times, and were all in their 30s. They described being a Juggalo at the Gathering as somewhat of an inexplicable experience, but one of being accepted for their differences:

Grant: "Music. The feel of being a Juggalo."

Jayden: “It’s different. It’s just different. That’s why I got into it. It’s a whole different vibe.”

J-Rock: “People accept you. The way you’re talking, walking, looking, just being.”

I see this as important in relation to the unifying aspects of the grotesque and the carnivalesque because it displays the ways in which the Gathering foils their everyday experience. For Juggalos, the festival is a transformational space wherein grotesque practices of subversion and bodily connection makes one a more comfortable version of themselves, rather than into someone different. They are no longer outcasts in this space, though they are all unified by being outcasts to the mainstream world.

### ***Costumes and Dress***

Later in my interview with them, Jayden explained how being an outcast defines being a Juggalo, and how this outsider status has formulated into the rich practices of the culture:

*“I’ve said it before and I’ll say it again, the one thing that separates us and makes us so special and it’s why we’re here every year - it’s because people are misunderstood, don’t understand us. That’s the beauty of it. We can see how cool your shit is, but they’ll never be able to see how cool our shit is. That’s why it’s so special, that’s why we’re here. That’s why we put on all this crazy looking shit, have our own language, do what we do. We can get you but you can never get us.”*

The “crazy looking shit” and exclusive language to the subculture that Jayden is referring to are all associated with the carnivalesque and the grotesque body. Perhaps

most significant of all, however, is the ubiquity of clown face paint and outlandish costumes among attendees. Most commonly, people would paint their faces with black and white face paint in the same style as Insane Clown Posse and wear Insane Clown Posse merchandise. Some incorporated different colors to their face paint, or wore clown costumes. This year, multiple people dressed as a Grim Reaper style figure known in the Juggalo mythology as The Wraith (see photo below), as the festival was a commemoration of ICP's album *The Wraith: Shangri-La*. According to the Dark Carnival mythology, The Wraith is the spirit responsible for giving the "death touch" (Insane Clown Posse, 2002) – he does not give judgement or determine whether one goes to heaven or hell, but merely brings death to individuals. To wear clown face paint, costumes, and ICP merchandise are badges of dignity and signifiers of subcultural capital demonstrating that one is a Juggalo and committed to the subculture. At the Gathering this year, the effects of this were bolstered by the climate. The heat meant these elaborate costumes and ICP hockey jerseys were uncomfortable and that one's face paint would likely melt – but to wear them in that weather showed commitment.



**Figure II.**

### *Language*

Even terminology used by Juggalos that does not immediately seem connected to the carnivalesque, such as the term “wicked ninja” as a sort of friendly identification, is embedded within the Dark Carnival narrative created by Insane Clown Posse. “Wicked ninja” is a casual term of address among Juggalos, as is simply “ninja.” According to a

Metro Times Detroit column “Ask a Juggalo,” it is a term of honor originating back to the creation of Psychopathic Records, and signifies a Juggalo who is not only “extremely down with the clown” (Metro Times Detroit, 2015) but is an advocate for the culture and helps others. However, at the Gathering, I heard it used more casually in conversation. “Whoop whoop” is perhaps the most commonly heard phrase in Juggalo culture – the ubiquity and significance of which I will discuss in the following chapter. Chants of “fam-ma-ly” and iterations of “MMFWCL” (Most Motherfucking Wicked Clown Love) are also prevalent.

This rich, unique mythology of aesthetics, language, and narrative pertaining to the carnivalesque have worked to unite people who have otherwise felt like outsiders.

The symbolism of the carnivalesque in Juggalo culture creates a fantastical, liminal challenge to the everyday and structural oppression.

### **Conclusion:**

The carnivalesque is a prevalent aspect of Juggalo subculture both literally and metaphorically. Insane Clown Posse has created an extensive narrative of symbols and figures explicitly connected to the carnivalesque through the Dark Carnival theme, but Juggalo culture further embraces a carnivalesque element through the festival, where practices of grotesque realism are at play. The lived experience of the Dark Carnival and grotesque realism function as means of displaying both badges of dignity and subcultural capital with a broadly unifying effect. In the following chapter, I will discuss how the unifying nature of the carnivalesque brings Juggalos together in a way that extends

beyond the notion of fan and into *family*, and the construction and limits of Juggalo boundaries under this term.



## ***Chapter five: Juggalo Family***

### ***The limits and networks of intentional kin at the festival site and beyond***

If one is a Juggalo, one is a part of the Juggalo family. At the festival, a man who went by the name Daniel Bogus explained it as this: “It’s because of the message. As soon as you realize that, it’s over with, there’s nothing that can tear you apart. Family is love, an unconditional element.” *Family* is ultimately what bonds Juggalos, creating such powerful and durable unity. The concept of family in reference, however, is not at all biological. Instead, to be a Juggalo is to be a part of a broader network of voluntary kin - a fictive, chosen family. Juggalo family is a means of defining the boundary of who is a Juggalo and who isn’t. Juggalo family is one component of subcultural capital, but is also a concept through which other forms of subcultural capital are produced and wielded.

Though their ties may not be biological or determined by any institutional authority, they are nevertheless almost spiritually significant to Juggalos. Nearly every individual I interviewed at the Gathering organically referred to the notion of Juggalo-family or was able to discuss what the notion meant to them in depth. Juggalo-family is not significant to a select portion of Juggalos, but is instead an integral feature to the entire subculture. The significant point that Bogus highlighted is that is the *unconditional element* of Juggalo family. Juggalo family is considered to have an unconditional bond as the result of simply being a Juggalo. Through an emphasis on acceptance and care, Juggalo family functions as an emancipatory support system for its members, offering a sense of community, resources, love, and individual worth in the absence of traditional markers of success determined by wealth. In this chapter, I will analyze the significance

of the concept of Juggalo family within the subculture utilizing interviews, field notes, lyrics, and news articles. I will explain the ways in which Juggalo family embodies concepts of intentional kin community and emancipatory community, defining these concepts, as well as the limitations of Juggalo family in embodying these concepts. I discuss the FBI's labelling of Juggalos as a gang and its impact on Juggalos as a means of classifying people within boundaries of lower class identity. Despite being labelled as a gang, Juggalo family in its most open progressive form adheres to an ethic of love that encourages all to live freely and fully (hooks, 2000). However, there are sometimes debates regarding the boundaries of Juggalo family and the people whom it includes. I will analyze the relationship between Juggalo family and race and gender, highlighting both the strengths and weaknesses of Juggalo family's ability to challenge oppressive norms.

### ***Defining chosen family***

Despite being such an essential part of the subculture, the concept of a chosen family is still difficult to concretely define. Though there is a discourse of almost divine fate to Juggalo's understanding of subcultural family, it is best understood as a network of intentional kin relationships. Margaret Nelson (2013) states that intentional kin relationships emerge by choice and often benefit from shared socioeconomic, socioemotional support.

“The addition of material support may be a by-product of intentional kin relationships; it may also, on occasion, be the reason for forming these relationships in the first place...Some discussions of intentional kin suggest that this might be a type of “pure relationship” formed without “ulterior” purpose except the pleasure derived from association (Giddens, 1992; Jamieson, 1999). But “pure” or not, one would assume that fictive kin relationships of the voluntary

kind require some kind of reciprocity, even if returns may sometimes be stretched thin (Nelson, 2000). From the “outside,” intentional kin has been characterized as having other functions, insofar as these types of relationships might expand everyday notions of what it is to be a member of a family. For example, Muraco (2006) argued that the bonds that form across boundaries of sexual orientation (what she calls “cross gender, different sexual orientation friends” [p. 1313]) can have both normative and liberatory effects” (Nelson, 2013)

”

Nelson defines intentional kin relationships as typically producing benefits that are not only emotional but also material or social. Benefits of intentional kin relationships can function as subcultural capital, providing incentive for aligning oneself within a subculture. Intentional kin relationships are at times a matter of convenience or a necessity for certain resources. These relationships can also emerge in order to fulfill what biological family does not provide. Among Juggalos, the subculture may function as an intentional kin relationship providing not only the emotional fulfillment of community, but an acceptance not found elsewhere and a sharing of resources.

Juggalo culture can also be defined as a community of support. A community of support is defined by certain principles (Mason, 4). Mason offers two ideal concepts of community that help distinguish the notion from simply society or association. The first, which he refers to as the “ordinary” concept of community, is a group of people who share a wide range of values and an encompassing or comprehensive way of life and identify strongly with the group (Mason, 7). The second concept is referred to as emancipatory. In this second form, a group of people not only shares this range of values and ways of life, but furthermore is concerned with having no systematic oppression or exploitation amongst each other. Mason analyzes emancipatory community as a Marxist alternative to capitalism (12), though asserts that liberation from the constraints of class

may not eliminate other forms of oppression such as those of race and gender. There are many important ways in which Juggalos as a community strive to be emancipatory, and ways in which they don't. These issues of liberation shape the boundaries of Juggalo identity.

At the festival, I spoke to a man named Jamie who was attending as a vendor. He was with a group of people who identified as Juggalos, and had been to the Gathering in previous years as both fans and vendors. For Jamie, the essence of Juggalo family was apparent in his first encounters with the festival. He identified that being a Juggalo meant “taking care of each other, making sure the next guy is being looked after and the guy next to you is taken care of. Family takes care of family. That’s all I’ve seen here is a bunch of brothers and sisters. You need something, they’ll take care of it, you help them out, they’ll help you out.” Jamie identifies that this discourse of family in Juggalo subculture is primarily about forming a network of resources. This sense of reciprocity is one of the ways in which Juggalo family can be identified as an intentional kin community. Within the subculture, being a Juggalo holds capital in itself through this reciprocity and sharing of resources.

This understanding of Juggalo family as a network of love and resources is emphasized within Juggalo music, as well. ICP’s song “Juggalo Homies,” off their sixth album *The Wraith: Shangri-La* (2002) is an anthem of Juggalo family. It is one of the most popular songs by Insane Clown Posse, with over eight million views on YouTube. It features verses by both Violent J and Shaggy 2 Dope, as well as verses by rap duo Twiztid, who were formerly part of Psychopathic Records. The song emphasizes a sense of closeness felt among Juggalos, and how these relationships can feel stronger than

biological ties. A chosen family is formed through the experiences Juggalos share together:

*“...them distant ass relatives over ham dinner  
If they really missed you so much  
Why don't they just call a (Muthafucka) ?  
If you wasn't blood, would you still have love?  
Or in fact does the blood make you think you have to love?  
Look, I probably love my family more than anybody here  
But my homies are family too, 3rd cousins' get outta here  
Who was you with when you got tattooed?  
And who was you trippin' with when you did them mushrooms?  
And who the fuck threw up all over your car?  
And then felt worse than you about that shit in the morning? (Friends ya'll)”*  
(Insane Clown Posse, 2001)

Here, Insane Clown Posse presents a dichotomy between biological family and Juggalo family. ICP questions this intrinsic love for biological family that is pushed through normative values, identifying that biological family has offered inadequate support. Instead, it has been other Juggalos who have truly provided emotional and social value to their lives above and beyond that which normative family discourse expects of biological kin. Even in circumstances that negatively impact the individual, i.e. having a friend throw up inside their car, an ethic of care is in place that accepts transgressions and rectifies mistakes not out of societal requirement but to maintain friendship bonds.

“Homies” asserts that while there is indeed a love for biological family, there is something significant about the bond between Juggalos. In fact, Juggalo bonds can be interpreted as stronger or more reliable, as the song positions Juggalo friendships as being

those which one can depend upon in formative experiences, meaningful memories, and essential situations. “Juggalo Homies” expresses this idea as well:

*Who loaned you money, homie?*

*Who owes you cash? (Who?)*

*Who taught you how to use the bong for the grass? (Who?)*

*I don't know much but I gotta assume*

*When ya hit ya first neder, ya homies was in the other room*

*We talkin' about HOMIES! HOMIES! (Insane Clown Posse, 2001)*

The first two lines here refer to the financial aspect of Juggalo community. Though the individual resources of a Juggalo might be limited, there is still the expectation of a reciprocal relationship between Juggalos and the idea that each will care for another. The following three lines refer to how fellow Juggalos are often the people to be there when one is experiencing significant “firsts” in life, i.e. the first time one has sex or smokes marijuana. This verse demonstrates the ways in which Juggalo family aligns with intentional kin relationships, providing emotional, material, and social support (Nelson, 2013). Intentional kin bonds involve the sharing of resources, whether it be the sharing of material goods and money or guidance. Juggalo bonds are intentional in that members of the subculture are united by this shared outsider identity created by boundaries of class. In day to day life, Juggalo family interactions like loaning money or teaching someone how to use marijuana paraphernalia make take on a more convenience-type bond. However, at the Gathering of the Juggalos, the intentional kin bond is far more visible and prevalent in that support and sharing of resources is offered to all simply by being a Juggalo.

### ***Family in Action***

The Gathering of the Juggalos serves as an intensive experience of Juggalo family in action. Many Juggalos do indeed get to experience the bonds of Juggalo family on a regular basis with friends and occasional concerts, but the Gathering enforces the universality of the concept to all Juggalos, including those one may not yet know. At the festival, most everyone present is considered to be part of the family. Even myself, openly attending as a journalist and reporter, was often identified by those I spoke to as being newly part of the family. By demonstrating my willingness to listen to their voices and experience their world, many Juggalos viewed me as aligned with their subculture. In terms of reciprocity, there was surely a hope that because they welcomed me, I would report on the Gathering with positivity and fairness. The open ability to quickly identify as a Juggalo and be a part of Juggalo family challenges definitions of intentional kin relationships in some ways. However, given the ways in which Juggalo boundaries are often drawn by class exclusion and the boundaries of white trash, to simply align oneself with Juggalos is considered intent in itself.

Simply attending the festival is another expression of intent. At the Gathering, the boundaries of Juggalo family are drawn broadly. This is expressed through certain displays of the subculture's signifiers and forms of capital. From the simple journey of walking from my vehicle to the festival grounds in complete darkness as I arrived at the festival on opening night, I was integrated into the community through the verbal cue of "whoop whoop." The exodus from the parking lot to the festival was long - though the two areas were simply across the road from each other, festival-goers were not allowed to cross the road. This was said by people working at the festival to be for our safety, and that police could issue tickets for crossing. During the day, a Juggalo with a truck gave

free rides from the parking lot to the festival entrance. On the first night, however, we were required to walk to the back of the parking lot, parallel to the road, until we reached a bridge that we could walk across. There was no marked path, and no lights to guide the way. As I saw someone approaching my partner and I from the opposite direction, I was slightly nervous. I could not see their features at all, and the area was entirely isolated. My nerves dissipated as they shouted “whoop whoop” in a friendly, matter-of-fact tone with the expectation of it being stated back. “Whoop whoop” is known as the “Juggalo call,” meaning everything and nothing in the same way Marines may chant “ooh rah” (Detroit Metro Times, 2014). When the stranger made this call, I knew they viewed us as part of the same group. For myself, initially an outsider to the community, repeating “whoop whoop” back to those I saw took practice. It was a challenge to everyday life, where society almost calls for keeping quiet and to oneself. However, at the Gathering, acknowledging one’s neighbor was practically second nature. By the third day of the festival, I could confidently shout “whoop whoop” at those whose tents I passed by *before* they said it to me. Every time, they shouted it back. When I first arrived, I feared that I’d be identified as an outsider, and treated negatively as such. However, the ubiquity with which I was greeted with “whoop whoop” signified my welcome in the community. I eventually felt confident that I was not going to be laughed at or treated aggressively for attending the Gathering as a reporter. Saying “whoop whoop” is both a token of the subcultural community, and an integrative practice within it. This small phrase signifies one’s presence within the community, and communicates the camaraderie within it. However, this signifier, like the Hatchetman symbol, can communicate one’s identity as a Juggalo in a detrimental way.



### *Family or Gang?*

Juggalo family forms such significant bonds that the United States' National Gang Intelligence Center has identified Juggalos as a gang since 2011. The United States Department of Justice defines gangs through seven traits, which include:

“a group identity which they use to create an atmosphere of fear or intimidation frequently by employing one or more of the following: a common name, slogan, identifying sign, symbol, tattoo or other physical marking, style or color of clothing, hairstyle, hand sign or graffiti; (3) the association's purpose, in part, is to engage in criminal activity and the association uses violence or intimidation to further its criminal objectives; (4) its members engage in criminal activity... with the intent to enhance or preserve the association's power, reputation, or economic resources” (Department of Justice, 2015)

Though Juggalos do indeed have a group identity that is shaped in part by common name, symbols, tattoos, and slogans, there is no element of criminal activity for the purpose of enhancing Juggalos as a group. Insane Clown Posse may write fictional accounts of violence against the rich in their music, but there is no encouragement of actual violence or functional intimidation at play. In a statement released by the ACLU in 2014, Insane Clown Posse have asserted that their music and practices of the subculture are expressions of their constitutional rights to freedom of speech and peaceful assembly. The National Gang Threat Assessment detailed that Juggalos are a "Non-traditional Gang" that is loosely organized. 21 states have allegedly identified "criminal Juggalo sub-sets" that "exhibit gang-like behavior and engage in criminal activity and violence, "

such as "assaults, thefts, robberies, and drug sales." This is something Insane Clown Posse and individual Juggalos have actively denied since the label was put in place. Claims regarding gang-like behavior and loosely organized criminal activity are mostly unsubstantiated. In 2014, Violent J and Shaggy 2 Dope filed a lawsuit alongside the ACLU against the Department of Justice and the FBI to challenge the label. However, in December 2017, the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that the FBI could continue to identify Juggalos as a gang.

Labelling them as a gang is a means of oppressive classification and control by law enforcement. In *Class, Status, Party* (2009), Max Weber states that "Law exists when there is a probability that an order will be upheld by a specific staff of men who will use physical or psychical compulsion with the intention of obtaining conformity with the order, or of inflicting sanctions for infringement of it." The structure of every legal order directly influences the distribution of power, economic or otherwise, within its respective community" (Weber, 2009; 180). Labelling Juggalos as a gang is an attempt for law to restore an order of compulsion toward conformity that Juggalos break. It is a widespread tactic of marking Juggalos as deviant, a practice that has been applied to subcultures since Durkheim and through the Chicago and Birmingham Schools (Haenfler, 2015). The label of deviance is furthermore a method of shifting cultural differences from macro to micro issues – rather than being the result of socioeconomic inequalities, Juggalo deviance is identified as personal flaw. According to Stuart Hall, representation is produced by a power to mark, assign, and classify (1997). Law and labels of deviance are exercises in symbolic power, upholding a regime of representation in which meaning is produced via difference (Hall, 1997). To identify Juggalos as gang members is to classify

them as a deviant Other, to strip them of power unless they conform. The symbols that are identified by law enforcement as having connections to a Juggalo gang are those that carry subcultural capital, and the badges of dignity that lend to feeling of authenticity.

In my time interviewing Juggalos, perusing their forums, and listening to their music, I have never once encountered a Juggalo who supported or bolstered the gang label. Any discussion of the gang identification is in the context of challenging it. However, even outside of legal contexts, being a Juggalo is still perceived negatively. Joe sees his experiences treatment as a Juggalo simply as a matter of being different:

"People just look at it, they see unity, they see something different that they don't understand, and they have to hate on it. We're not the first group to experience this... Juggalos are the modern punk rock of the 70s. There's so many parallels to the two. People get beat up for being a Juggalo just like they got beat up for being a punk. You've got the crazy hair, the makeup, and people just don't understand. People don't understand that people are different. They just expect everybody to live up to the status quo and then when they see somebody that isn't what they want to see they have to hate on it. (July 29th, 2017)

Joe's comparison of Juggalo subculture to punk subculture is particularly salient in that punk subculture is the focus of Dick Hebdige's work on the relationship between aesthetics and subculture (1979). Hebdige analyzed 1970s British punk youth groups as an attempt to both subvert hegemonic culture and negotiate with it. Aesthetics of "crazy hair" and makeup function as signifiers of deviance from the norm, but also offer a cohesive group identity shaped by markers of style. Hebdige saw punk aesthetics as

becoming reabsorbed into aesthetics of hegemony. Juggalo culture remains largely unabsorbed, and is instead criminalized.

The Juggalo gang identification has had a number of serious consequences impacting the daily life and freedoms of Juggalos. According to a Rolling Stone article published shortly after ICP lost their lawsuit, "One plaintiff said the FBI's gang designation had led to unfair treatment by the police, another was denied the chance to enlist in the Army and a third, an Army corporal who'd served in Iraq, Afghanistan and Korea, was 'in imminent danger of suffering discipline or an involuntary discharge' because of his ICP tattoos, " (Rolling Stone, 2017). Juggalos I spoke to at the festival shared the consequences they have faced as a result of the ruling over the years. Jayden, a 32 year old Juggalo whom I've quoted previously, said that,

"In Omaha, we've been considered a gang since like 2005, so I've been dealing with it a long time. Every time you get pulled over they run your shit, if you get in trouble they can associate you with a gang as well. If you're a person going through shit and you get in trouble, it adds on to it. They'll pull you over, go through your shit, question you about everything. Happens all the time."

(Medrano, July 27th, 2018)

Local, state, and even federal governing figures are not required to consider the gang label in legal decisions, but those who do can significantly increase the charges one receives for other crimes by associating crimes with gang activities, and increases the surveillance by law enforcement that a Juggalo will undergo. Thirty eight year old John, also known as J-Rock among Juggalos, was lucky in one particular instance. When I

asked if he and his friends had faced negative repercussions as the result of being a Juggalo, they all laughed. J-Rock said that he dealt with the gang label during a child custody case. "The kid's mom brought up in court that I was a Juggalo. She researched it and tried to get me on it. Luckily the judge didn't give a fucking shit. He was like, 'I don't give a fuck.' They could have fucked me." (Dale, July 27th, 2017) Fortunately, J-Rock maintains custody of his children.

Like any large group in the US, some Juggalos engage in criminal activity. Poverty is an issue for many Juggalos, as is homelessness (Petering, Rhoades, Winetrobe et al, 2017). In both situations, drug use, theft, and other criminal activity are often means of survival. Insane Clown Posse's music makes reference to casual drug use like smoking marijuana, but also frequently and explicitly discusses murder. Despite this, committing murder is not a widespread phenomenon among Juggalos. This is to say that, ultimately, Insane Clown Posse does not advocate for any widespread criminal behavior. Joe, a 23 year old Juggalo from Illinois has, similar to J-Rock and countless other Juggalos, faced unsubstantiated discrimination from law enforcement for being a Juggalo. He spoke of one context in which he was identified as a gang member by police officers:

"When they [the FBI] did the gang thing, I had gotten arrested with a friend that was carrying marijuana in the car and when I got arrested, they even said 'We know it's not yours, we know it's your friends, but he won't admit it so right now you're guilty by association,' but then they asked me about my tattoos and I had to explain to them and they said 'Oh, you listen to ICP? You're a Juggalo? We're gonna put you on a gang list.' And I was like 'the fuck you are,' because I'm not a gang member, I've never taken part in any sort of gang activity, besides coming to the Gathering, hanging out with people from around the world, and enjoying myself. (Medrano, July 27th, 2017)"

Juggalos are read and identified by the outside world according to signifiers of the identity, particularly with tattoos, which are often associated with gang activity by law

enforcement (Phelan, Hunt 1998). The subculture provides a sense of camaraderie and escapism from the everyday (primarily at events like the Gathering) that, combined with a unified set of signs displayed through style, makes Juggalos a target for a deviant youth gang identification (Hebdige, 1979).

### *Why be a Juggalo?*

With these ramifications in mind, why would one choose to identify as a Juggalo? For many, being a part of Juggalo family feels unquestionable, an innate part of their being. Being at the festival site allows for the opportunity to embrace this part of oneself. For many, the festival experience is entirely antithetical to the public, legal perception of the group. As Joe later said in his interview, "Honestly, people that come to the Gathering are happy, because we're here. We're amongst people who understand each other. Regardless of whether you like everybody or not, there's a common understanding, a common aura behind the Juggalo family... I don't understand why nobody can see the positives in something that everybody sees as just dark and terrible." Joe defines the space of the Gathering as important simply by the collective presence of Juggalos. It is a space in which subcultural capital can be exchanged, and the experience of intentional kin relationships can offer most meaning and benefit.

Jacob, a 19 year old from Arkansas that I spoke to at the festival expressed the notion that he was always a Juggalo. "Of course I was always a Juggalo, I just never knew," he said. "I later realized that I had been a Juggalo before I actually realized I was a Juggalo. Looking back on the past, from where I was a Juggalo and didn't know... That's the definition of a Juggalo, finding your inner self." (Jacob, 7/27/17) Before

identifying as a Juggalo, Jacob had spent much of his life in juvenile detention centers, and had attempted suicide. For him, becoming a Juggalo offered a new perspective on life and loving community. Identifying as a Juggalo gave Jacob the perception of becoming the person he desired to be, thereby becoming his most “authentic” self (Haenfler, 2014; 83).

Daniel Bogus, 29 from Michigan, expressed a sentiment similar to Jacob’s:

“We were Juggalos from the fucking beginning, we just didn’t know it. You know what I mean? Sometimes it might take three years, you see toddlers here and they’re down and they’re happy. They’re out of school, they’re like ‘fuck yeah.’ I had a ten year old greet me at the door, it was great he was like ‘welcome ninja.’ From there to, shit you could be 50 and not know that you had that influence in you the whole time, you just didn’t know how to name it. That’s how this group is. Juggalo all day. Juggalo everything. It’s because of the message. As soon as you realize that, it’s over with, there’s nothing that can tear you apart. Family is love, an unconditional element.”

From Bogus’ perspective, to be a Juggalo is again to be one’s most authentic self. It is a revelation of one’s “true” form. The boundary of Juggalo identity is open to all ages, but more significantly Bogus expresses the idea that there may be Juggalos who do not even yet know they are Juggalos. The “message” of the culture is what draws one into this community of intentional kin.

Insane Clown Posse has discussed their interpretations of Juggalo family in a variety of ways. Often it’s addressed with levity, emphasizing how the subculture is made up of outcasts, as is the case with their song “We Belong,” which opens with the lines

*“Aww, little baby bitch ass is crying again, what’s the matter?”*

*Feeling like you don’t fit in anywhere?*

*What about fitting that ass in with us...*

*We’ll fucking gladly take you*

*We take all shapes, colors, sizes, and genders!*

*We are the mighty, mystical, mythological*

*Dark motherfucking carnival, byatch!” (Insane Clown Posse, 2002)*

Here, ICP essentially says that there’s no qualifications for being a part of the family. Regardless of your identity, if you feel you don’t have a place in society, Juggalos will welcome you into their community. This acceptance on its own has potential to be liberatory. The lyrics of the song go on to describe how some Juggalos are currently living out of their car, or are currently on parole, or are struggling to feed their children. The song lists a number of possible hardships “some of us” Juggalos could be going through, and ultimately says that “but then some of us's equal us all/and I’m with you.” With this, ICP emphasizes that all Juggalos are equal, and that the adversity of one Juggalo is the adversity of all. This idea demonstrates the ways in which Juggalo family can be interpreted as an emancipatory community, one shaped by an emphasis upon loving equality and a collective well-being (hooks, 2000). There are, however, contestations and limits to this liberation.

### ***A family for whom? Racial discourses***

I find it notable to assess the ways in which Juggalo family applies to people of “all shapes, colors, sizes, and genders” in practice. General observation concludes that the majority of Juggalos are white, cisgender men. This is not necessarily a gauge of the subculture’s demographics as a whole and in particular, its inclusivity. Insane Clown Posse is especially vocal regarding issues of racism. Insane Clown Posse has maintained an aggressive and arguably radical tone in this regard. For example, the Confederate Flag



has often been a target of attack. An entire track from their 1992 first album *Carnival of Carnage* is devoted to a narrative of fighting racists called “Fuck Your Rebel Flag.” A later album, *The Marvelous Missing Link: Lost* (2015) contains the song “Confederate Flag,” opens with a clip of an unknown man saying “I’m a good Christian white man, I fly my rebel flag high and with pride boy, I don’t need to hear any bitching about my flag, you need to hike your britches up and turn down that (expletive) music.” Violent J then begins rapping a story about driving through Alabama and encountering a truck flying a rebel flag. In the story, he shoots the passengers and blows the truck up with a molotov cocktail. The story continues along this path, with Violent J and Shaggy 2 Dope delivering verses that highlight the issues of the rebel flag:

*“Rednecks call it pride; pride for what?*

*White pride for slavery, it sickens my gut*

*I see that flag as a challenge, that you want to fight*

*...*

*It's juggalos all over the south, that don't wave it*

*Proud of where they're from but that flag, they hate it*

*Cause they understand it's a symbol of slavery”* (Insane Clown Posse, 2015)

The song is a violent attack upon slavery apologists who claim the Rebel Flag to be a symbol of Southern pride and heritage, and details a graphic narrative of Violent J and Shaggy 2 Dope murdering members of the Klu Klux Klan. At a concert in 1993, Insane Clown Posse burned a rebel flag on stage. It is not well documented, but this, along with ICP offering up rebel flags for the audience to destroy, is said to have happened multiple times at shows and Gatherings since (Vice, 2015).

This ideology is not necessarily shared by all Juggalos. Despite ICP's anti-confederate flag stance, I still saw a few Juggalos wearing Confederate Flag-printed clothing, have the flag at their campsite, or have bumper stickers of the image on their car. Juggalo news site "True Juggalo Family" has posted articles and topics for discussion on their Facebook page regarding ICP's views, which have garnered debate among Juggalos. "The confederate flag doesn't stand for racism..." responded one man on a post from the group. A number of Juggalos still adhere to the opinion that the flag is representative of a Southern heritage, but those who express these opinions are often challenged by fellow Juggalos. Though there remains some level of ignorance towards the racist alignment of the Confederate Flag, discourses around race among Juggalo Facebook pages far more commonly asserts that the subculture is vocally and fundamentally against racism. Juggalo family is not a monolith, and the discourse within it varies. However, public discussions such as this demonstrate that there is an effort internal to the community to shape and define what Juggalo family means. Often these discussions center around ways the concept of family can align toward openness, justice, and liberation, and they are important moments for struggling over the boundaries around and belonging within the Juggalo family. Insane Clown Posse's violent lyrics towards those who wave confederate flags helps bring more discourse to the topic among Juggalos.

On their 1999 album *The Amazing Jeckel Brothers*, Insane Clown Posse further aligns their inclination toward violence with their anger regarding the hypocrisy surrounding multiple issues in the United States, like widespread inaction regarding

poverty, celebrity gossip, and institutional racism in “Terrible.” Shaggy 2 Dope performed the following verse:

*“The country we live in was built by slaves*

*Beat down and murdered and stuffed in their graves*

*You put a slave owner on the one dollar bill*

*And you wanna know why I kill people?!”* (Insane Clown Posse, 1999)

Insane Clown Posse does not mince words: the United States’ concealment of and silence toward its racial history is a reason for their homicidal lyrics. Though Insane Clown Posse has made broad statements about accepting people of “all colors,” lyrics like those in “Fuck Your Rebel Flag” and “Confederate Flag” demonstrate that the group is not simply promoting color-blindness. While at times their statements of inclusivity may lack nuance, they have been vocal about racism in a significant way. Specific discourses regarding symbols like the Confederate Flag vary among some Juggalos, but Insane Clown Posse has made concerted efforts to shape the culture as one explicitly opposed to racism in practice and symbol. This shapes the boundaries of Juggalo culture as welcoming of all racial identities, in contrast with what Violent J and Shaggy 2 Dope have identified as a racist outside world.

### ***A family for whom? Performances of gender and sexuality***

On the most basic level, Juggalo culture relates to the theme of family and gender in that for many it is truly a family affair. Though not every aspect of Insane Clown Posse’s lyrics or events at the Gathering are necessarily child-friendly, it is a common and

welcome practice for people to bring their children. In a 2017 Bustle online article interviewing women that attended the Juggalo March on Washington, some spoke of how their ability to care for their children at Juggalo events bolsters their feelings of acceptance within Juggalo family.

“Many of the female marchers I spoke with were proud to call themselves Juggalettes because of a single word, one they believe embodies what ICP is about: family. “It’s about being accepted and being loved no matter what — plain and simple,” Meagen Tabor, a Juggalette from Plymouth, Indiana, tells Bustle. “I can stand next to somebody here or at the Gathering [of the Juggalos] or any other concerts, and they’re going to have my back, and I’m going to have their back as a family.” Both Tabor and her daughter, Alyssa, have attended the Gathering together on numerous occasions. Tabor wasn’t unique in making the protest a family affair — throughout the rally, mothers could frequently be spotted with their children, listening to the speeches or just bonding with other Juggalos. Jaclyn, a Juggalette and nursing assistant from Norfolk, Pennsylvania, was attending the rally with her baby girl, Skylar, who was wearing a handmade “Jugga Baby” t-shirt. (Bustle, 2017)

Being able to safely care for one’s child at a Juggalo event makes it far more accessible. Tabor’s ability to bring her daughter to Juggalo events, including Gathering, and her assertion of Juggalos “having [her] back” are two of the benefits of being a part of this intentional family. In some ways, bringing her child to these events could demonstrate Tabor’s commitment to the subculture, and this yield some type of subcultural capital. Jaclyn’s dressing of her child in DIY Juggalo apparel is another example of this. This quote indicates that the boundaries of Juggalo subculture include children and mothers. For parents in the subculture, this could be emancipatory in that they are not restricted from subcultural activities with their children. Juggalo subcultural capital is such that people can maintain it while upholding other responsibilities.

For some women, an integral part of being part of Juggalo family is being able to incorporate their biological family. This could, however, highlight some of the ways in

which Juggalo family may sometimes function according to normative ideas about the family: when it comes to children, it's the woman's responsibility to provide care. This is not an inherent feature of being a Juggalette, but is a gender norm that has been carried over from mainstream discourse without much criticism. At the same time, being a Juggalo mother who brings their children to events such as protests or the Gathering challenges traditional notions of motherhood as existing within a domestic space. One can maintain a multiplicity of identities while still mothering for their children. Though I did not see many children, I did see some walking through the grounds with their parents, being pushed in strollers by women and men, swimming in the lake, and generally being a visible part of the festival.

Though it embraces an ideological openness of all genders, Juggalo culture has been susceptible to issues of sexism and misogyny. Insane Clown Posse lyrics occasionally contain gendered slurs like "bitch" or "hoe," and women are also occasionally the target of violent narratives. The role of gender remains a topic of discussion and criticism throughout popular musical genres which often feature misogynistic themes ranging from subtle disparagement to explicit narratives of violence, particularly in contemporary analysis of rap and hip hop (Adams & Fuller, 2006). While men do dominate the subculture and account for the majority of artists involved in Psychopathic Records and related paid acts, there is nothing inherent to the discourses amongst Juggalos that emphasizes a systematic oppression of women. In fact, what I viewed at the Gathering in terms of gendered interactions generally took a liberatory theme regarding women, though perhaps not in a critical manner. For example, a freedom of bodily expression was encouraged in events like the Miss Juggalette Pageant, for

which a bikini was suggested. Discourses regarding the ways in which modesty could potentially be empowering for some women were absent.

Masculinity remains a largely unquestioned aspect of Juggalo culture. It is reproduced through the music, which often relies upon using the slurs “bitch” and even “fag.” Insane Clown Posse has stated their position on the latter term in a 2012 *Vice* interview, with Shaggy 2 Dope saying “When we say it, it’s the same way as calling someone as ‘asshole’ or a ‘fuckhead.’ ... it’s not trying to slam gay people. I know plenty of gay people and they’re cool as hell, and I’ve got no problem with gay people at all. Hating gay people is like being racist — it just doesn’t make any sense.” Still, the use of both “bitch” and “fag” are indicative of an ideological violence. Individual reproduction of masculinity, violence against women, and violence against other men are means of employing the social means of power attached to gender hierarchy (Kaufman, 1987).

There is a Juggalo feminist movement that critiques issues women have faced within the subculture. After multiple incidents of witnessing misogyny and sexism targeted at Juggalettes, Philadelphia based artist Rachel Paul posted a call to action on Juggalo news site *Faygolovers.com* in 2013. She wrote,

*“How many of you reading have had similar experiences? Were you assaulted? Or...were you an assailant or just a heckler? And what about bystanders? Were you wading through the Faygo with your head down, or were you there for your sister in her time of need? It’s no secret that these kinds of things have been going on for some time at shows... lately, every night, some chick gets manhandled, one way or another, whether at the hands of their spouses, security guards, or patrons. It happens at every show. And how many more women (scratch that, juggalettes) will be treated like rag dolls at these clubs before we say “Enough”?”*

This letter highlights some of the limitations of Juggalo family. In order to maintain one’s subcultural capital, a woman within the subculture may experience

assault, or feel the need to keep quiet when witnessing the assault of others. With this letter, Paul proposed the creation of the group Lette's Respect, a primarily online women's advocacy group where people can address sexism and misogyny within the subculture. In doing so, Paul works to expand the boundaries of Juggalo family and its emancipatory qualities. She identifies the ways in which Juggalo family has been actively detrimental to women, but is actively attempting to challenge these limitations of the subculture. She specifically identifies this letter as an attempt to change the treatment of *juggalettes* rather than women more broadly. In doing so, this letter and the formation of Lette's Respect are efforts of changing the boundaries of what it means to be a woman in the Juggalo subculture.

The letter also brought up a specific call to action to bring changes to the Miss Juggalette pageant. In the past, the Miss Juggalette Pageant at the Gathering of the Juggalos was hosted by infamous porn personality Ron Jeremy. As host, Jeremy encouraged, even coerced participants to perform sexual acts on stage, including inserting Faygo soda bottles in their vaginas. According to a 2015 Vice article, participants who did not want to engage in such acts would be dismissed from the show by Jeremy. Fortunately, as a result of this letter and Lette's Respect, organizers of the Gathering of the Juggalos removed Ron Jeremy as host and banned him from attending the Pageant.

As previously discussed, the Pageant showcases a variety of talents and body types. Those who choose to demonstrate their sexuality remain free to do so, but it is no longer a requirement to perform. "The whole part of this is to bring it back to the middle," Paul said in the 2015 Vice interview. "I'm about freedom of expression... I would never defy a super-freak," referencing Rick James' 1981 song "Super Freak"

about a woman who is very openly sexual. The article continues that “Other feminist Juggalettes back up Paul's description of Lette's Respect as trying to create a nuanced world. Take Kace Kush, the Juggalo performer, who helps run the Sausage Castle's outdoor strip club at the Gathering. After years of opening for different rap groups, she considers the Gathering her favorite venue because she can perform comfortably without scorn from most men or women. ‘As a feminist, I'm a proud, empowered woman and I'm comfortable with what I do,’” said Kush. I witnessed both the Miss Juggalette Pageant and the outdoor strip club at the Gathering, and viewed a contested display of Juggalette presentation. The Miss Juggalette Pageant was not sexually explicit as it is said to have been in the past. Most women wore bikinis or minimal clothing, but there was no nudity or encouragement of sexual acts. Still, a normative view of beauty dominated. The winners were those who wore little clothing and were thin. At the outdoor strip club, women could indeed dance on a strip pole or even give lap dances without scorn, but the women there were paid entertainers. I did not witness any regular women attendees take part in these performances. However, men at the festival could pay for a public lap dance as part of the show. There was again no nudity in this, and acts like fire breathing were also part of the performance, but it was certainly targeted toward a masculine, heteronormative audience. Overall, there were very few opportunities for women to be in the spotlight at the festival without having to employ beauty or sexuality. Certainly, acts of this nature are feminist for those who choose to perform them as such, but few other conceptions of feminism were on display at the festival, which limits the emancipatory potential of the subculture. Displays of normative displays of women's sexuality are ultimately forms of subcultural capital, and assert a sense of hierarchy among Juggalettes.



This hierarchy is further displayed through the employment of normative masculinity among Juggalos, demonstrated in ICP's use of "bitch" in their music and in issues addressed in Paul's letter.

There is, however, a growing discourse in the Juggalo community regarding the LGBTQ+ community. Lette's Respect was a strong advocate for the Pageant's first openly transgender participant, Miss Alexis Macknight. After posting support for Macknight on Facebook, other Juggalo media outlets like *TrueJuggaloFamily* and *Faygolovers* published articles about Macknight and Lette's Respect's effort to have her in the Pageant. Comments on these articles are mixed in tone. "My only question is why THIS transgendered contestant is the only one allowed. A second potential contestant that is gender fluid was told no they could not compete even if they were female at the time of the contest and they were banned from attempting to. Why is Alexis any different?" said one woman (*Faygolovers*, 2016). Another person suggested the Miss Juggalette Pageant simply becomes a talent show, open to anyone. Many comments emphasize a binary notion of gender, or say that transgender women should not be allowed to participate until they have undergone gender confirmation surgery. Some viewed the acceptance of trans women as a mainstream political issue, and allowing Macknight to participate would be to "bow down to the whims of society." One commenter who disagreed with allowing Macknight to participate even wrote that "I'm pretty sure this is going to stop me from identifying as a Juggalo now" (*Faygolovers*, 2016).

There is also vocal support for Macknight in the comments, with a Facebook page called JuggaLGBT replying to anti-LGBTQ+ comments and sharing longer comments about how the Juggalo community should be open and accepting toward LGBTQ+ issues.

Others shared a similar sentiment: “Either way it is wut it is! Silly me been sittin here the whole time thinkin that the #1 Statute of Juggalo-ism.... is that everyone is to be accepted.. dont wana see it dont attend the competition, straight up! Ima do me. Miss Alexis Ninja Burger, you do u homie!” one man commented on the article.

*TrueJuggaloFamily* vocalized their support as a publication and interviewed Macknight (TJF, 2017). The interview opens with a statement about what Juggalo love means by the interviewer, who writes under the name Chulita:

“What does Juggalo Love mean to you?

To me, it means love period. Love is supposed to be unconditional, I believe when you truly love someone it includes their strengths, flaws, fears, beauty, intelligence, insecurities, so pretty much everything that makes a person human. But we are talking “Juggalo Love” here, being a Juggalo has always stood for showing love to those who are different. Most of us at one time or another have felt rejection, whether it be from society or from our own family. Thanks to the Dark Carnival we can all come together and be proud of who we are and embrace our differences. We have Hippie Juggalos, Metal Head Juggalos, Mom/Dad Juggalos, Gangsta Juggalos, Gothic Juggalos, Thuggin’ Juggalos, Cop Juggalos, Street Kid Juggalos, and we have Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual and Transgender Juggalos.” (TrueJuggaloFamily, 2016)

The article also emphasizes that Macknight’s participation in the Pageant is an opportunity for Juggalos to show their support for the LGBT community, and demonstrate the universality of Juggalo love. It emphasizes the idea that love in the Juggalo context is not about romantic love, dominating love, or ego and control. This letter and the comments made on the *Faygolovers* article demonstrate that there is serious debate over the boundaries of Juggalo identity, the criteria for belonging, and subcultural hierarchy. By Chulita’s interpretation, the subculture is an intentional community of people who are different and have been treated as such. The Dark Carnival serves as the narrative and mythology through which Juggalos can identify themselves through

aesthetics and practice, which can be utilized by people embedded in *other* cultural boundaries, such as the goth subculture, parenthood, crime, and, according to Chulita, even law enforcement. Though Juggalos sometimes have differing opinions about belonging in Juggalo family, the simple fact that these discourses are present and shared demonstrates how aspects of Juggalo boundary making remain in the hands of Juggalos.

### ***Closing thoughts on family***

Though it is not without flaw, Juggalo Family can be emancipatory for its members according to a number of intersections of identity and oppression. Considerations for who belongs in Juggalo culture and who doesn't are contested. Though there is largely an emphasis upon the emancipation of others through the subculture, issues of gender, race, and sexuality remain. *Family* as a cultural theme is particularly relevant in the context of class and outsider identity. As a intentional kin community of outsiders united by subcultural capital and badges of dignity, Juggalos are labelled as deviant and identified as gangs by law enforcement. Despite this, most Juggalos interpret family as an unconditional bond of love. . On a broad level, Juggalo family serves as a means of navigating the world. It offers not only a relational identity, but various spheres through which one attains and utilizes social and cultural capital. Juggalo family, as a network of people with a plethora of shared lifestyles works to form the boundaries of Juggalo identity. The relationship between Juggalo identity, class, and the boundary of "white trash" is the subject of the next chapter.

## ***Chapter six:***

### ***Negotiations with class boundaries in the Juggalo subculture***

Juggalo culture is not an attempt to *change* the boundaries of class identity, but is instead an empowered negotiation with these boundaries. At their core, these negotiations deal with the creation and consumption of signs (Featherstone, 1991). As discussed in my first chapter, the narrative mythology surrounding Insane Clown Posse deals predominately with horror and the carnivalesque, carrying deep connections to the bodily experience and class conditions. These signs are thus both internalized reflections of socioeconomic identity and subversive intentional depictions of it. Conveyed through a multiplicity of Juggalo actions, including listening to the music of Psychopathic Records, attending events, participating in online forums, dressing as a Juggalo, encouraging the concept of chosen family, and embracing the discourses of the culture, a set of dispositions is produced. These dispositions are coded as lower class by both viewers and participants of the culture, utilizing spectacle as a primary means of communicating these significations. By making the dispositions of Juggalo identity into spectacle, the culture is able to control the class discourses imposed upon it. In this way, Juggalo culture is an empowered embodiment of class identity. It is both a response to being confined by the boundaries of white trash identity (Wray, 2006), and a reformulation of it.

Insane Clown Posse and Juggalos are viewed by the outside world as spectacles of white trash identity (Halnon, 2012). They function through a highly visual culture that disperses a narrative symbols to be witnessed, but not understood, by the outside world. Insane Clown Posse is aware of their use of gimmick in their public identity, but not

simply for the effect of selling records. Their clown imagery makes them ostentatiously observable to the mainstream, but builds a wall between commoditizing, appropriating forces and the Juggalo world. People of the mainstream world can and do dress up as Juggalos for Halloween, yet the validity of experience of being a Juggalo remains intact. Unlike the punks of the 1970s in Dick Hebdige's focus, Juggalo aesthetics have yet to be featured in fashion magazines. Though other symbols of class like Dickie's workwear, trucker hats, pink lawn flamingos and cheap Pabst Blue Ribbon have been appealing to middle to upper class aesthetics since the late 1990s, the practice of painting ones face like a Vaudeville clown hasn't quite been on-trend.

Juggalo culture is shaped by class, but not necessarily determined by it. Juggalos are identified by themselves and others as low-skilled workers. In "What is a Juggalo?" (1997) one of the ways Insane Clown Posse answers this title question is that a Juggalo is "He's a graduate/He graduated from, well/At least he got a job" and in "Homies" (2002) Insane Clown Posse suggests Juggalos might be working jobs they hate, such as "dish washing or fucking flipping fries." Likely, the most relatable class status situation for Juggalos is one of being detached from property or the means of production. According to Weber, this is the position through which class struggles begin (2009). When class-interests align among lower class groups, communal action may emerge and result in some form of protest. I posit that Juggalo culture is the result of an alignment of interests and communal action. The lifestyles and aesthetics of Juggalos are practices that function as "rituals" (Weber, 2009) of producing a Juggalo status group and notions of honor within it.

Theories that explore the relationship between class and culture or class and taste often do not consider the agency of the consumer, asserting that artistic choice is aligned with a social hierarchy of consumers determined by class (Bourdieu, 1984)]. According to Bourdieu, while the upper class may have an inclination toward the opera or classical music, the lower class consume that which is shown on TV, commercial paperbacks, and whatever the radio plays (Bourdieu, 1984; 2).] In Juggalo culture, class remains an essential defining characteristic. Class is indeed signified through cultural, consumer, and artistic choices. In contrast with Bourdieu, however, I do not claim that Juggalo culture is determined by class without agency.

Much has happened since Bourdieu published *Distinction* (1984) that would seemingly allow for better agency on the part of the consumer. A proliferation of material goods and information in late market capitalism has led to a proliferation of content, and the ability for more consumers to create their own. Hip hop has been determined by class in that it is both often an expression of class and racial identity as well as a practice of creating art with minimal resources. However, rather than being the predetermined choice of musical consumption of a particular demographic, it demonstrates the agency of those within a demographic to shape their own artistic world. It is no longer the case that music making is reserved for an educated elite; today, nearly anyone can make and even distribute their own music without the aid of major art industries and institutions. Such is certainly the case for Insane Clown Posse, who began recording their own raps in a DIY studio space in a friend's home, like many other hip-hop groups have done. Small tapes were recorded on a minimal budget put together by Violent J and Shaggy 2 Dope, and were distributed throughout the Detroit area first by hand, and later through small music

stores, as many independent musicians did prior to online streaming. Eventually, word of their music spread, as did their distribution numbers. Nevertheless, production remained in the hands of Violent J and Shaggy 2 Dope. Never did Insane Clown Posse sign to a larger record label - instead, the duo created their own label, *Psychopathic Records*, which exists today with a portfolio of other artists. The label remains in Detroit, where all recording, producing, manufacturing, and shipping of music and merchandise is done under the roof of one warehouse. All of Insane Clown Posse's products, musical and material, remain in their control.

Karen Bettez-Halnon has analyzed at length the ways in which symbols of lower class identity have been appropriated by those of higher economic status in mainstream consumerism. Such lower class symbols, akin to Michele Lamont's notion of "badges of dignity" or alternative signifiers of success and fulfillment in the absence of material wealth (Lamont, 2002), involve stylings and practices like tattooing and muscle building, as well as symbols that embody less of a *practice* and more a reflection of resources, like hand-me-downs or torn jeans. According to Bettez-Halnon's research, these symbols, stylings, and practices have long served as ways of developing and representing a class-based identity. However, these symbols are frequently appropriated by those of higher classes. Similar to Dick Hebdige's discussion of punk's re-appropriation into mainstream fashion, lower class stylings like tattoos, ripped clothing, piercings and more have become considered chic, adopted as part of *popular consumer culture*. In this way, the practice of wearing such tokens of class becomes recreational and leisurely, a type of touristic slumming.

Considering this practice of absorbance by popular consumer culture, building a network of symbols and ideology that resists this is essential. By serving as a codified image of a particular lifestyle, Juggalos are able to resist having their stylizations become the norm. The carnivalesque and Juggalo family work to produce this codified image.

Mike Featherstone's work *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism* helps to analyze the ways in which consumerism produces codified images, which draw the lines of social relationships (Featherstone, 2007). Featherstone draws from the works of Baron Isherwood and Mary Douglas, as well as Pierre Bourdieu. Baron Isherwood and Mary Douglas posit that consumer goods define social relationships through the accessibility and time required to acquire said goods (1979). For example, an expensive bottle of wine defines social relationships as it marks not only the wealth necessary to obtain the bottle, but also the knowledge of wines necessary to assign it as a desirable object. According to Featherstone, Isherwood and Douglas' theory aligns with that of Pierre Bourdieu in *Distinction*, connecting Bourdieu's notion that "taste classifies and classifies the classifier" (1984) with the notion of time and resources as linked to discriminatory judgements of consumer taste along class lines. Featherstone asserts however that these classifications are no longer so distinct, as the cultural logic of postmodern consumer culture means that the field of symbolic goods is no longer stable. For Featherstone, this instability potentially extends to habitus. His argument here is ultimately to suggest that commodities do indeed form distinctions of social/class relationships, but that the excess and chaos of signs and meanings in postmodern culture has led to less straightforward signification. This is useful in considering the relationship between class and Juggalos. Distinctions of *what makes a Juggalo a Juggalo*, separate from the everyday person, can



often be determined by consumer practices. By sight alone, identifying a Juggalo is most frequently achieved by analyzing what an individual is wearing. If one displays the symbols unique to Juggalo culture, such as clothing or tattoos of the Hatchetman, one is immediately identified as a Juggalo by those savvy to the culture. There is a process of knowledge acquired over time with Juggalo consumer practices as Isherwood and Douglas argue, however there remains an ethos to the culture that rejects a Juggalo-specific embedded knowledge. The Juggalo-specific embedded knowledge that does exist to the culture is based within an accessible field of visual, verbal, musical signs. There is no background knowledge one must pay to access in order to understand the world of Juggalo creation.

### *Class inclusiveness in the Juggalo experience*

Class is a visible and manifest aspect to Juggalo culture at the Gathering. Divisions of class status remained. There were some opportunities for those of a higher class position to have a better, more privileged experience at the festival than poorer individuals. The significant opportunity for an expression of wealth at the festival was through campsites. Those who owned campers or mobile trailers could pay around \$450 for an assigned campsite with access to electricity. This meant those with money had more ability to cook their own food and to escape the heat. There was also one VIP event option one could purchase that included a meet & greet with artists from Insane Clown Posse's label Psychopathic Records and a buffet. This event cost an additional \$150. I did not meet anyone at the Gathering who participated, likely because a limited number of tickets were sold and because of the cost.

One's ability to attend the Gathering is surely defined by a number of socioeconomic factors. One must be able to save up the money necessary to buy a festival ticket, afford gas, food, and other travel expenses. One must also have the ability to take time off work, and could potentially require childcare if one does not want to bring their child to the festival. There is no doubt that attending the Gathering is simply not an option for many Juggalos, who may risk losing their jobs if they take time off, may be unable to find alternative care for their children, or simply cannot afford to attend. The ticket to the festival was \$180, which allowed admission, parking, and tent camping for five days and four nights. All concerts, contests, autograph signings, seminars, parties, and other events were included in this cost. Spending money was in no way a necessity to enjoy the festival once one entered the grounds if one had the ability to pack their own food and other necessities. This means being able to afford a cooler, and potentially a grill. Beyond the option of buying foods typical of a fair, frozen drinks, or possibly a bag of ice and a lighter from one of the few vendors, nothing at the festival cost extra money. There were a few free cookouts hosted by the festival with traditional American grilled foods like hot dogs and hamburgers (I am not aware of whether vegetarian, vegan, or Kosher options were available.) A group called Juggalos for Jesus was stationed in the parking lot of the festival, offering free food and beverages, as well. Still, in order to properly sustain oneself at the festival, one would have to be able to pack food to bring or pay for food at the festival.

Attendants of the festival ranged in age, though most were between 18-45, by my estimate. There were a number of families with children. There were a few people at the festival with visible mobility issues, but the overall landscape of the festival was not

handicap accessible. The grounds were covered in a thick dust, and getting to certain areas of the festival required travelling on an incline. There was a trolley that travelled around the festival, but it did not appear to have the ability to accommodate a wheelchair.

Attendees were welcome to bring as much food, alcohol, or other resources as they wished. It is a common practice at Gatherings for small markets to arise, with people selling burgers, beers, and occasionally illegal substances. Anecdotal evidence from attendees suggests the selling of illegal substances was far more common in previous years than in 2017. There was reference to a “drug bridge” that emerged on a bridge at earlier Gatherings at a different venue, where one could reliably find Juggalos selling drugs. The open “drug bridge” practice ended in 2013 when a 24-year old man died of a drug overdose.

According to Riverfront Times, a St. Louis, MO newsweekly, “the incident took place near the seminar tent, central on the Gathering grounds. The man who died, whose name has not been released, reportedly came from the direction of the “drug bridge” two to three hours before his body was found, feeling sick, and asked the owner of a large camping tent if he could have a place to sleep for a while, citing “family” (in reference to the Juggalos’ sense of community) in his plea. He was granted accommodations alongside four other individuals who were already sleeping.” (Riverfront, 2013)

The witnesses explicitly cite the drug bridge as the potential source of the drugs that caused this man to overdose. Previously, it seems that the owners of the festival grounds, festival employees, and law enforcement turned a blind eye to drug sales. As the

result of this change and due to an increased police presence at the Gathering's new Oklahoma location, I did not see any open drug sales.



***Figure III***

I did, however see the explicit promotion of resources and safe practices. Though tragic, the article detailing the 2013 overdose identifies how this young man was a stranger to the witnesses, and was given a tent to sleep in under the premise of Juggalo family. Discourses of Juggalo family encourage a sharing of resources and a care for others. The image on the left is a more positive example of this. The owners of this sign camped in a

central location at the festival, and made themselves open and available to Juggalos needing support for addictions. These were not outsiders or medical professionals offering their services (though there were medical professionals on site), but were instead fellow Juggalos offering camaraderie. Juggalos for Jesus offered similar services. Their goal was largely to share ideas of Christianity with those who were willing to listen, but they also simply wanted to help others by giving away free food. Practices like this promote the idea of an emancipatory community that challenges the confines of class. Practices of love and care offer resources that may be absent for lower class Juggalos.

I met people at the Gathering who did not even pay for a ticket. Security was rather relaxed, leaving many opportunities for those without passes to sneak into the festival unnoticed. Other Juggalos without passes partied and camped in the parking lot. Many Juggalos spoke of hitchhiking around the country in order to get to the Gathering, or of picking up fellow Juggalos on their journey to attend. There was a common ideology of sharing of resources and providing for one another. One could hypothetically hitchhike to the festival, enter without a pass, money, or food and ultimately befriend other Juggalos who would share food and offer a tent to sleep in. Facebook pages for the Gathering, both official and Juggalo-made, had numerous posts in the days leading up to the festival with people offering and seeking rides from across the country. I encountered two men one evening at the festival who went by the names Frylock and Antfarm said that they themselves had hitchhiked across the country to the Gathering, a practice they used to travel frequently. Neither of them appeared to be wearing the wristbands required for entry. I did not want to directly ask them about their lack of wristbands, as my asking could elicit fear or suspicion. However, at one point the topic of security arose in our

interview, and I mentioned that even with the press pass I was wearing, I saw very few people checking for wristbands or passes at the festival entry points. They shared the following:

F: I heard of one guy who just got a t-shirt from Juggalos for Jesus and threw it over his arm and walked in. Nobody noticed.

A: You've got some family that really needs to get into the show and they can't quite afford to do it.

F: Even that being said I heard there's still people partying in the parking lot.

A: Someone needs to go out there and tell them they can just walk right in. Just don't do fucked up shit.

F: Just be respectful and you don't have anything to worry about."

In this conversation, Frylock references the group "Juggalos for Jesus," a Christian outreach group of current and former Juggalos hoping to spread the word of God. Their tents were located in the parking lot of the festival, accessible to those who didn't have passes. They offered free food and beverages, and gave away t-shirts, CDs, and religious materials. According to Frylock, someone placed a t-shirt they received from the group over their arm where a wristband allowing entrance to the festival would have been. This person looked the part of one attending the festival and was able to enter freely. I myself entered the festival on numerous occasions without encountering a grounds employee or security. The festival was not gated, but it did have a few official entry points that were occasionally staffed by a festival employee. At times these entrances were unstaffed, and there were additional areas of the festival where if one walked off the dirt path, they would be in the midst of the festival. I entered the festival from un-official entrances with

ease. Though the ticket cost is minimal compared to other festivals, it is still a significant expense for many. Both the fact that the ticket cost is low and that it is unaffordable for many is indicative of the class demographics and class culture of the festival and subculture.

### ***Subverting false consciousness through badges of dignity***

Halnon makes the essential connection between material realities, symbolic constructions of identity, and lower class culture (Halnon, 2004; 2006; 2014), Images of lower class culture/identity/realities have, in a postmodern consumer setting, become commodities. According to Halnon, these commodities are rationally consumed by those with money and resources in a form of poverty tourism. In this case, the tourist “is estranged from what really lies behind the commodity: the haunting humanity of the poor and the fearful reality of poverty” (Halnon, 2002). This is a reiteration of what Dick Hebdige asserted about punk subcultures and their eventual re-appropriation into the mainstream (1979). Bourdieu posits that those who are poor are essentially destined to display symbols of being poor, and to consume media accordingly. However, Juggalo culture is an example of the ways in which lower class people, though in some ways still bound to a class-positioned habitus, are active agents in their cultural consumption and symbolic constructions of identity. Juggalos negotiate the boundaries of class identity through the aesthetics and ties of the subculture, but are often still viewed by the outside world according to a white trash stigma. “White trash” is a historically, socially, politically constructed concept utilized as a means of labelling lower class white people and

excluding them from hegemonic boundaries of whiteness (Wray, 2006; Isenberg, 2016). It is a specific social category that negotiates with the construction of whiteness and the oppression of class, determining who belongs where in social space and enacting discrimination and criminalization to enforce this (Wray, 2006; 16, 134). “White trash” is a slur embedded with meanings that have been created through hundreds of years of public policy, political rhetoric, and popular media as justification for class prejudice in the United States (Wray, 2006; 135-138). The discourses of this identity are negotiated with in Juggalo culture.





**Figure IV.**

This image comes from an online artist named Rob Dobi, who previously produced a popular series of illustrations that characterize a variety of stereotypes within different subcultures. Other targets of Dobi's work have included black metal fans, fixed gear bicycle riding hipsters, and other "alternative" aesthetics. All of these illustrations are

intended to be comical, relying upon well-worn tropes of a culture. Dobi's characterization of the stereotypical Juggalos is visually rather accurate, in that the man portrayed in the image would be immediately recognized as a Juggalo by those within the subculture and those familiar with its imagery. The two primary distinguishing features of the caricature are the clown face paint and hatchetman tattoo and necklace. Most anyone with a basic knowledge of Juggalo aesthetics would recognize them as such. The jersey is another defining feature, as it displays an image of a character within Insane Clown Posse's musical narrative, though this is less accessible to a non-Juggalo. The other details of this Wicked Juggalo are not as specific to the culture, yet seem accurate in a general way. Baggy shorts, work boots, "Coolio" hair and an unkempt goatee could be part of a Juggalo's aesthetic. The description Dobi offers for the image offers more insight to the artist's decisions:

"He blindly follows two middle-aged, talentless hacks who like to play dress up- so he follows suit! Buying into a merchandise empire bigger and more self-indulgent than that of Hannah Montana, the sad clown mindlessly purchases whatever ICP sells... keychains, faygo soda, flags, purses, lighters, and athletic gear that will never be put to use. With his facepaint, lice-ridden goatee, coolio haircut, and outdated JNCO jeans, the juggalo often finds employment at gas stations and carnivals. He spends his minimum wages without a second thought at the annual Gathering of the Juggalos. This is the only place he can find true happiness amongst his brethren, whether it be at a Psychopathic Records concert lineup or a JCW wrestling event. Just watch out for the broken light tubes and barbed wire."

Dobi asserts that Juggalo identity is a matter of being a *cultural dope* - that Juggalos are ignorant lower class people blindly making consumer decisions. Dobi's description plays into a number of classist discourses. He makes the claim that Juggalos are poor by saying they work low-status, minimum wage jobs. The rest of the descriptors are defined primarily by a class context, with the exception of the "Coolio hair," which is further defined by its racial implications. This descriptor refers to Black rap artist Coolio, whose aesthetic has nearly always included small braids twisted outward from his head. Some Juggalos do indeed wear their hair in this style and others in a way that appropriates from Black styles. This is one of many appropriative aspects of Juggalo culture, and certain aspects of Black culture have been co-opted by Juggalos for subcultural capital. However, Insane Clown Posse does not claim ownership of the aesthetics they've utilized (or hip hop more broadly, for that matter) and has been vocal about racial issues. In a 2014 interview with *Spin*, Coolio stated that he is a Juggalo, having performed at the Gathering of the Juggalos in 2009 (Spin, 2014).

Nevertheless, Dobi utilizes stereotypes that have long been used to define the boundaries of class and whiteness. His goatee is allegedly "lice-ridden" because lower class people are often associated with poor hygiene; he wears "outdated" shorts because he cannot afford to buy new ones; he is drawn as an overweight man who owns athletic gear that will never be used because lower class people are thought to be more likely to be in bad health. Yet, the Juggalo spends his money on everything ICP sells, implying that lower class people are irresponsible with their money. Dobi asserts these characteristics as flaws, almost pathetic features of poverty. To put it bluntly, Dobi identifies Juggalos as *white trash*. In *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of*

*Whiteness*, author Matt Wray analyzes the social and ideological tools that have been used to distance lower class white people from a hegemonic, “proper” conception of white people. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, discourses surrounding lower class white people as lazy, stupid, and susceptible to parasites led to eugenic practices of sterilization (Wray, 2006). Viewing lower class white people as dirty, ignorant, and incapable of making their own decisions is a social idea that has long been produced as a way of articulating whiteness as a “bounded cultural identity” (Wray, 2006). White trash ideologies are means of excluding lower class people from hegemonic whiteness. These ideologies shape hegemonic whiteness to have boundaries that prevent it from being accessible to lower class people, while simultaneously constructing boundaries of what white lower class identity is.

The symbols of the carnivalesque, family, and Juggalo identity in the subculture are akin to what Michele Lamont identified in her study of working class men as badges of dignity. From an outsider's perspective, emblems of the culture may not seem at all dignified. They are in many ways caricatures - they get co-opted and used in the construction of negative images of being poor, of being white trash, and being seen as a fool. Juggalo imagery draws upon a lengthy history of the clown as one in poverty, one in depression, and one without intelligence. By employing this imagery, Juggalos re-shift and reform the discourses regarding their own identity and make it something empowering. Wray asserts that existence within the boundaries of white trash identity is inherently subversive:

“White trash names a kind of disturbing liminality: a monstrous, transgressive identity of mutually violating boundary terms, a dangerous threshold state of being neither one nor the other. It brings together into a single ontological

category that which must be kept apart in order to establish a meaningful and stable symbolic order... White trash names a people whose very existence seems to threaten the symbolic and social order.” (Wray, 2006; 2)

The stylings of Juggalos reflect the monstrosity and liminality of the boundary terms of white trash. Juggalos are not necessarily confined by these boundaries, but are instead able to reformulate them by making such a spectacle of the identity. In the subculture, the carnivalesque is a reflection of the liminality of white trash. The subcultural capital of Juggalo culture is frequently a means of reformulating this stigmatized identity. Though Wray does not interpret white trash as a subversion of the status quo, Juggalo culture seems to be a means of actualizing the potential for it.

Beyond the narrative of murdering the rich via a travelling carnival of souls, ICP repeatedly identify themselves and Juggalos as the alcoholics, the drug addicts, the poor people, and of course the freaks. It is a way of both making fun of oneself before one can be made fun of and of highlighting mainstream attitudes towards poverty. It's also a way of demonstrating that Juggalos are not undergoing false consciousness. For example in their 1997 song “What is a Juggalo” off the album *The Great Milenko*, Violent J and Shaggy 2 Dope answer the question of “what is a Juggalo” by describing a variety of different types of people. The descriptions are absurd and self-deprecating:

*“What is a juggalo?  
He drinks like a fish  
And then he starts huggin people  
Like a drunk bitch  
Next thing, he's pickin fights  
With his best friends  
Then he starts with the huggin again”*

According to this description by Violent J, a Juggalo is an alcoholic who is at one moment fighting his friends and hugging them the next. A verse by Shaggy 2 Dope describes a Juggalo as:

*“What is a juggalo?  
He's a graduate  
He graduated from...well  
At least, he got a job  
He's not a dumb putz  
He works for himself scratching his nuts”*

In both verses, Violent J and Shaggy 2 Dope play into the boundaries of white trash identity, and make a challenge to it. ] Juggalos identify themselves as those on the fringes of society, and use the subculture as an expression of that, reformulating aspects of these boundaries into subcultural capital and badges of dignity. Given that the very first album ICP released begins the narrative of class violence founded upon a suburban/urban divide, it's clear that this song is intended to be a satire of interpretations of poverty. I interpret ICP and Juggalo's self-reflexive attitudes towards class as a form of boundary work (Lamont, 2000). In the first chapter, I analyzed the role of the carnivalesque horror in the music and culture. Carnavalesque horror is used indicate liminality, to represent horrors of the outside world, and to demarcate lines of identity. Carnavalesque horror therefore functions as boundary work for the subculture: given the accessibility of the subculture in terms of inclusivity in membership and affordability of the festival, Juggalo culture is one of self-selection. Anyone can be a Juggalo, but only those for whom carnivalesque horror appeals take on the identity. “What we're doing is reaching people like us. We're reaching out to people that find this kind of entertainment cool, you know

what I'm saying? This is what was cool in Detroit for kids our age! It was just rappers trying to outdo each other with these crazy gimmicks,” said Violent J in an interview (Rolling Stone, 2015). The people “like us” are those who relate to the subculture, those for whom Juggalo subcultural capital work as badges of dignity. As ICP have discussed in their music, this is likely the outsiders, outcasts, and people who don’t fit in. Among Juggalos, the boundaries of who fits in to this “us” are contested, but the primary common identifier of who fits into this boundary is simply liking the music. It is likely that those who relate most to the music are those who share lifestyles and experiences that have bounded them as “white trash” or similar class positionalities, but ultimately, anyone has the *potential* to enjoy the culture.

### ***Violent J, Shaggy 2 Dope, and the limitlessness of the Juggalo World***

There is no doubt that Insane Clown Posse have made economic benefit from their subculture. An online celebrity net-worth source, though likely unreliable, cites Violent J and Shaggy 2 Dope as being worth \$15 million each. As of 2010, Psychopathic Records makes about \$10 million annually (Wired). Though Juggalo culture is much more than a world of consumerism, this is not to say that there is no awareness of the gimmicks at play. Insane Clown Posse have themselves asserted their love for gimmicks, citing The Beach Boys’ surfer image as an inspiration (Spin, 2012). Violent J and Shaggy 2 Dope came from poor families and neighborhoods, and successfully grown wealthy. This is perhaps why Shaggy 2 Dope has more recently made statements about how it doesn’t matter if you have a “silver spoon or a crack rock” in your mouth in order to be a Juggalo (Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, 2010), expanding the boundaries of who can be a Juggalo. They themselves no longer fully represent the subculture they developed. But the subculture

does indeed still retain a lower class identity. The styles, lyrical content, and attitude have not widely shifted, despite Violent J and Shaggy 2 Dope's increased wealth. Though the duo have created a massive empire of subcultural merchandise, they have shirked the idea that consumerism is essential to Juggalo culture. ICP stated this most prominently in their 2002 song "Thy Unveiling," the final track off the album *The Wraith: Shangri-La*. This album was performed in full at the 2017 Gathering, leading up to a momentous finale of Insane Clown Posse bringing people from the audience onstage and showering the rest of the audience with Faygo soda. "Thy Unveiling" is a climax of sorts in the Dark Carnival narrative, describing the "truth" of their major albums, referred to as "jokers cards":

*"Now we have been told this carnival shit has touched many lives.*

*People have fuckin` sworn to us they too can feel it inside.*

*What is it that draws you in, this magic that compels you?*

*We`ve been waiting six fuckin` joker cards to finally tell you."*

ICP goes on to say that the Dark Carnival and the Juggalo subculture "ain't got nothing to do with us, it ain't Psychopathic Records," and instead asserting that they're an equal part of the movement: "all we're doing is pointing this shit out to you, we in this together." They further distance themselves from the consumer aspect of the culture in saying that "This ain't no fucking fan club, It ain't about making a buck. Don't buy our fucking action figures bitch, I don't give a fuck." In the song, they reveal that rather than themselves being the creators of the Faygo showers, the hatchet man symbol and the entire carnival circus environment, the actual creator is God. They explicitly state that "the Carnival is God" and that they hope all Juggalos find their relationship with God. In this way, ICP transforms their position from a money-making one to almost that of a



preacher, spreading the word of God. They explicitly transfer the idea that they're in it for the money into the idea that they're communicating a love for God and an expression of spirituality. Yet even so, their method of delivering this message remains unchanged from their methods of delivering messages of horror. In fact, much of the dialogue of the song is aligned with that of the overall Juggalo discourse of death and the carnivalesque. ICP associates the abject ("Walk in and hang with the dead carnival/ Dead dirty carnies, dead juggalos," "Murder Go Round/ How ya gonna fuck with a wicked clown) with the experience of uniting with God and ultimately going to heaven when one dies. In fact, ICP seems to make the claim that the Dark Carnival is a reflection of heaven, and will continue when Juggalos die. The God in mention is the Christian God, as ICP has since openly discussed their Christian values. Yet clearly, their relationship with religion takes on the unique quality of embracing concepts that could even be seen as demonic or unholy. Nevertheless, the crux of the Juggalo experience, from ICP's perspective, is to unite Juggalos toward God so that they may remain united in the afterlife.

This spiritual element has potential to relate to class in numerous ways. I interpret it as bolstering the transgressiveness of Juggalo culture. The most powerful element of this is in its unifying potential. Through "Thy Unveiling," ICP promotes the idea that ICP is not simply a "fucking fan club" and is instead a collective embrace of God. It implies a certain right among Juggalos to be themselves and be a part of the subculture. It relates again to the concept of family in the idea that no Juggalo will ever truly be alone because they will always be united by the Juggalo label. This is a challenge to the hegemonic culture that asserts its dominance upon Juggalos. In *Subculture*, Hebdige makes the ultimate claim that "no amount of stylistic incantation can alter the oppressive mode in

which the commodities used in subculture have been produced,” (Hebdige, 1979) asserting that any attempts of subversion by a subculture are futile. In the context of Juggalo culture, one may agree that this is true in the material world. However, by imposing a spiritual, divine narrative into the Dark Carnival, Insane Clown Posse is able to subvert the very necessity for making true change in material life by placing hope in an afterlife. In *Class, Status, Party*, Weber identifies that for low status groups, dignity is often linked to a religious belief of heaven or a world beyond the present. He states that “the sense of dignity of the negatively privileged strata naturally refers to a future lying beyond the present, whether it is of this life or of another. In other words, it must be nurtured by the belief in a providential 'mission' and by a belief in a specific honor before God” (Weber, 2009; 190). Though Juggalos may not specifically see themselves as having a divine mission or honor that privileges them before others in the eyes of God (and furthermore are not bound to Juggalo identity in the same way as ethnic identities or castes to which Weber was originally referring), Insane Clown Posse’s beliefs of an afterlife deliver a hope and dignity that material life may not provide, and have guided them in their subcultural development.

Class is an essential aspect in understanding the boundaries of Juggalo culture. Symbols of class and aesthetics associated with “white trash” identity have been used to define who Juggalos are from an outsiders perspective. However, Juggalos themselves utilize these symbols, making them part of the subcultural capital and badges of dignity for the group. In some ways, Juggalos subvert the boundaries that have been imposed upon them, though ultimately the lived practices of Juggalos and the Gathering remain shaped by the confines of class. Still, Juggalo culture indicates the ways in which

subculture negotiates with class, rather than being solely determined by it. Insane Clown Posse and Juggalos can be a spectacle of poverty, and whether their self-spectacle functions as a true resistance is irrelevant. What matters is the sense of unity and comfort in being a Juggalo. This is a resistance in itself.

## *Chapter Seven*

### *Conclusion, or, why the Carnival's not for everyone*

Juggalo culture is both a challenge toward and an embrace of the boundaries of white trash. It is both an embodiment and a subversion of lower class identity. In this thesis, I have argued for this through an analysis the subculture's use of symbols of horror and the carnivalesque, and the ways in which theatrical, artistic spectacle and violence are reflections of class violence. Through music, aesthetics, and the Gathering space, Juggalos utilize the Dark Carnival narrative and imagery to portray their identity and affront hegemonic culture. Music, aesthetics, and the Gathering space furthermore produce the concept of Juggalo family. This is a chosen kin network that emphasizes an ethic of care, love, and community on the basis of being an outsider, and the basis of being a Juggalo. This network often provides support and resources to those for whom societal structures do not. The Dark Carnival and Juggalo family are ultimately negotiations with one's habitus, and demonstrations of agency in consumer practices. The Gathering offers many examples of the ways in which Juggalos are not a classless society – class struggles and differences remain apparent amongst the group. However, active practices of the Dark Carnival and Juggalo family exhibit the boundaries of white lower class identity, and the ways in which these boundaries are formed and disputed.

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In the spring semester of my first year of college, I joked with some friends that I was going to write my thesis about Juggalos. This was during a period that I saw my

peers dress up as Juggalos on Halloween, and heard them ironically use their slang. As I thought about my thesis idea “joke” further, I realized I might actually have a solid concept to work with. My early interest in Juggalos emerged out of the spectacle they’ve created. While it was so prevalently mocked, it was clear that some of this had to be intentional. I wanted to explore the ways in which Juggalos made a mockery of themselves, and why. For years I watched documentaries and read articles about the Gathering and wondered why Juggalos were being presented as trashy, clueless, and stupid. Sure, a Juggalo might identify as trashy, but the culture seemed so much more nuanced than to be displayed as clueless or stupid. Classism was clearly playing a role in the public understanding of the subculture. I realized Juggalo culture was the perfect site to explore the richness and resilience of lower class identity, a topic for which little discussion was given among my social justice-oriented peers. I wanted to present the concept of white trash culture as something worthy of analysis. I wanted to mediate my experience growing up within that realm and my position in academia. This project has helped me give voice to my own experience with class identity and the boundaries of white trash, though I may be distant from it now.

Since taking on this project, my primary task in studying Juggalo subculture has been to argue for its radical potentials. What I’ve witnessed and heard through both Insane Clown Posse and Juggalos is that this subculture is a life-saver. It’s a path to redemption, empowerment, family, and identity. Most importantly, it’s a path to these things for people for whom traditional paths are limited. It’s a path for the outsiders, the weirdos, and the people with no money. Class is such an essential yet under-discussed aspect of Juggalo culture. Class is both what has produced the culture itself and also what

has made it so hated. We're currently in the midst of an interesting period for social justice and its discourses. Before and after Trump was elected, the rural, white, lower class population became a topic of discussion. Many political analysts saw this demographic as responsible for Trump's win, despite the majority of his voters being affluent Republicans (*Washington Post*, 2017). Meanwhile, in 2016, odd sightings of scary clown figures began occurring across the US. By 2017, the cultural fascination with scary clowns saw a complete renaissance, bolstered by the remake of Stephen King's *It* (History, 2017; Vulture, 2017). This brought Juggalos into the mainstream cultural dialogue, often in a misrepresentative way. Amidst these sightings, *Time* asked Insane Clown Posse to comment. Violent J ended up publishing an entire editorial, spinning the focus from these clown sightings to who he perceived as the real threats to society: police brutality, oppressive government, and racists:

*"These clowns threaten the very fabric on which our nation was supposedly founded upon—and for some f—ing crazy-a— reason, they're getting away with it. From keystone-cop clowns shooting unarmed citizens, to racist clowns burning down Islamic centers or clowns in the NSA spying on us through our cell phones and laptops, America has turned into something far more terrifying than Insane Clown Posse's Dark Carnival. Even a scrub like me who dropped out of school in ninth grade can see what's going on. Today's reality is scarier than anything you'll ever hear on one of our albums."*

I see this quote as emblematic of the status of Insane Clown Posse in 2018, and why it's so important to talk about a subculture such as this. Violent J and many Juggalos see themselves as "scrubs," and much of America sees them this way, too. In academia, identifying tyranny like this as the true threat might seem obvious. But when we reflect upon the media's recent meditations upon lower class white people and right wing politics, statements such as Violent J's are all the more radical and essential.

There are still plenty of reasons to be critical of Juggalos, none of which rely upon the classist tropes. Race, cultural appropriation, and masculinity are just a few of the significant topics that are largely absent from this thesis. There is much left to say about Juggalos, with new points for analysis emerging constantly. I look forward to continuing this project in other forms.

As I've argued in this thesis, Juggalos broadly care about the liberation of others. This liberation is, at times, eccentric. For some, liberation is flashing their chest, moshing in a concert crowd, or painting their face with grease paint. For some, liberation is about letting their freak-flag fly, so to speak. In a lot of ways, that's really what being a Juggalo is about. Juggalos predominately accept anyone regardless of race, gender, orientation, region, or whatever other demographic distinction. As I've argued in this thesis, there are certainly caveats to this, and there are varying discourses regarding topics like transgender issues and the Confederate flag. But what these discourses show is that if you want to be a Juggalo, you'll find other Juggalos who will welcome you with open arms. But they don't care if you like them. Juggalos are often people who have been disliked their whole lives, and this is their way of empowering that identity. There are struggles of belonging within the community, but there remains discourses among Juggalos to expand and redefine the boundaries of the subculture.

If there is a definitive claim I can make about Juggalos, it is that they truly do not need me to stand up for them, which is something I've at times been inclined to do. They certainly do not want to be labelled as a gang and do not want to be legally punished for being Juggalos, but being disliked is not their concern. The words "Fuck off" are almost as essential to their dialogue as "Whoop whoop." Juggalos are people who have always

been looked down upon - for being different, for being poor, and for being Juggalos.

They are not looking to change that fact. They're just looking to enjoy their life with that they've been given, and avoid being arrested for doing so. The world of Juggalo's isn't for everyone, but it is for anyone. If you're down with the Wicked Clown Love, then that's all there is to it. If you're not? Well, in their words, if you don't like them, "*you can fuck off. Carnival's not for everyone.*" (Homies, 2002).



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